University of Alberta

The (Re)Presentation of "The Boxer": A Discursive Analysis and Deconstruction

by

Lane Robert Mandlis

©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of *Master of Arts*

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2005

0-494-09049-9

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN:
Our file *Notre reference*
ISBN:

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

This thesis interrogates different aspects of the representation of boxing and boxers. Using discourse analysis and specific Derridian deconstructive ideas, I examine how the dominant understanding of the boxer is constructed and reified in popular culture. I begin by discussing the conflation of the athlete with the sport, and how that reinforces the construction of gender within boxing. I then explore how the stereotype of boxing discourse is incommensurate with nationalist discourse in Canada. I conclude by delving into queer theory and how the dominant discourse about boxing allows for a queer reading of all boxers. The presence of bodies that can be queered within boxing in turn allows for the questioning of both the boxing discourse and a hegemonic social standard. Because the constraints on boxers and would-be-boxers occur from many different angles, this thesis attacks the discourse from different directions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the faculty, staff and students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation for their support, discussion and friendship. I would specifically like to acknowledge the specific foundational assistance of those professors who helped me to lay the ground work for what follows: Gamal Abdel-Shehid, Judy Davidson, and Karen Houle. Thanks also to my committee members, Lise Gotell and Rob Shields, who brought very different and wonderful perspectives to my work. To Debra Shogan, my supervisor and friend, thank you seems insufficient for all of the support you have given me along this journey. You have helped me to do work that I am proud of, and you have helped me to be who I am; I thank you for all of that.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 ..... **1**

INTRODUCTION 1
The Question *1*
Boxing Basics *4*
Methodology *8*
Discourse Analysis *13*
Deconstruction *14*
Conclusion *16*
Papers *17*
References *18*

CHAPTER 2 ..... **22**

SHE SURE CAN HIT: BOXING WITH GENDER 22
Beginnings *22*
The Dominant Discourse of Boxing *24*
The Conflation of the Sport and the Athlete *29*
The Masculinization of Boxing *36*
The Incoherence of the Female Boxer *38*
Failure of Masculine/Feminine Binary Language *41*
Conclusion *47*
Figure 2-1 ..... *49*
References *50*

CHAPTER 3 ..... **55**

BOXER EH? (NOT) A CANADIAN TRADITION 55
Beginnings *55*
What does it mean to be Canadian? *56*
How do the myths remain current? *63*
Can the boxer be Canadian? *65*
Who can(not) be the Canadian boxer? *70*
Where does this take me? *73*
References *76*

CHAPTER 4 ..... **79**

QUEERING BOXING: BOXING QUEER 79
Paradoxical Separability *79*
Queer Theory *85*
The Dominant Discourse On Boxing *91*
Queer Theory and Boxing *95*
Final Thoughts *98*
References *103*

CHAPTER 5 ..... **107**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS 107

Thoughts *107*

Future Directions *109*

References *112*

List of Figures

Figure 2-1 The Orthogonal Relationship Between Gender 49

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Question

I worked my way through many different sports, never finding the one that seemed right for me. I was always too slow or too competitive or too aggressive or too disinterested[1]. I tried team sports and individual ones, traditional and non-traditional. Combative sports seemed to interest me most, so I tried many of them. I did tai chi but found I could not remember the movements. I liked Tiger kung fu but was too aggressive in sparring. I was too disinterested in Wing Chung (another form of kung fu), because it was not as dynamic as Tiger. Muay Thai kickboxing was fun, but I was too slow with my feet and it seemed too dangerous. It was at this point that I took up amateur boxing. I was tall, strong, and fast for my weight. I was competitive enough, aggressive enough, and very interested. Unlike the other combat sports, physically and personally I had all the attributes of a good boxer. I had liked watching boxing as a child, but I had never thought it possible that I could actually participate in it. I had idolised Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, and George Foreman, but I had never thought it was possible for me to follow in their footsteps. After all, girls don't box, do they?

I joined a boxing gym, and found that actually, many girls and women do box. After training for a while, I wondered why so many of the girls[2] at my boxing gym wanted to box. They often referred to difficulties with their boyfriends, or in getting

---

[1] By disinterested I mean that I was rather ambivalent about it. It was not that I was uninterested in it, but that it did not really matter to me whether I participated in it or not.

[2] By girls, I am referring to a group of teenaged girls that boxed at the club. These girls were between 13 and 18 years of age, and attended secondary schools.

boyfriends because of their commitment to boxing. The time it took for them to train, as well as the black eyes they often sported from sparring, seemed to offer obstacles to their school romances and other friendships. What did boxing do for them that they were willing to sacrifice so much for it? What did they gain? A few answers offered themselves; answers that are deeply imbedded within dominant ideas about boxing. Maybe they were trying to assert their masculinity? Possibly, yet all of these girls were quite heteronormatively feminine outside the boxing ring; in fact most of them were hyperfeminine. Maybe they were trying to fight their way out poverty? Again, this seems unlikely as many of these girls were from upper-middle class suburbs.

As I puzzled about this, I started to realize that the original question itself was rather curious. Why should I wonder what draws these girls to the gym? Why do I not ask the same question about everyone else there, including me? How is it that there were ready answers to my question, even if the answers seemed inadequate? And why was it that I idolized boxers and yet never thought it possible to be a boxer myself? It was these last few questions that really fascinated me. Why do we make assumptions about the people who box? Where do these notions come from? As I started looking into what others had to say about boxing and boxers, I began to notice a disturbing trend. A particular image of the boxer was pervasive, yet it seemed to me that this image could not capture the complexity of any boxer.

I became curious about how boxing is represented both in academic writing and in popular culture. Could these representations have compelled me to ask these particular questions? Why did I think to ask about the girls' reasons for boxing but not the reasons everyone else chose to be there? Implicitly, I seemed to think that the girls were

somehow different than other boxers. This implicit assumption is an acceptance of the dominant representation of the boxer. This is not to say that they are not different, they are. What cannot and should not be assumed is that they would be different in their reasons for choosing the sport; or that they had to give up more than other boxers; or that the reasons that the others boxed were somehow less interesting or less important. By making the assumption that the girls had different reasons than the other boxers for being at the gym, I became complicit in this narrow understanding. It was an acceptance of this same stereotype that led me to idolize boxers as a child, but never see the sport as an avenue for my own competition. Furthermore, the stereotype was a trope[3] that stared out at me from all kinds of different media. While different sports have different stereotypes, something about the boxing trope continued to bother me. The rigidity of the stereotype, along with its negative connotations, strikes me as more extreme than other sports' tropes.

The rigidity of the stereotype stems from a firmly entrenched discourse. This discourse produces the trope, a familiar image that recurs within popular culture, and the naturalization of this image produces the stereotype of the boxer. It is my intention to subvert this dominant discourse in order to legitimize the possibility that boxers can be intelligible outside of the trope. The stereotype functions as an effect of the discourse. There is not a "Truth" of the boxer underneath the trope waiting to be found, but the dominant discourse functions in such a way as to be understood as a "truth". The presentation and representation of the stereotype then functions as a "fact"; the "fact" of the boxer that all boxers must then be seen to embody. As Stuart Hall (1997) notes,

[3] By trope, I am referring to the commonly seen image of the boxer as being a culturally accepted figure of speech in which the stereotypically depicted norms of 'the boxer' are understood as the literal 'truth' of those who box.

"stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference'" (p. 258). Gilman argues that stereotyping may not be a good practice, but it is a necessary one, as stereotypes are "part of our way of dealing with the instabilities of our perception of the world" (p. 284). According to Hall (1997), stereotyping creates a "symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant'" (p. 258) which acts to maintain the social order.

I wish to show the complexity of any boxer, so that those who choose to participate in this sport might do so without the taint of this stereotype haunting them; that they might have the possibility of a separation from the negative connotation of the sport and be understandable outside of boxing. This might then allow others to see this sport as a possibility for all who choose to participate.

Boxing Basics

The history of boxing is unusual within sporting history. Most modern sports started out of amateur clubs, and moved into professional arenas. Modern boxing is notably different in that it began as a professional pursuit. The amateur and professional versions of the modern sport grew out of English prizefighting (Greig, 1996; Sammons, 1988). Because fighters entered the prize ring for monetary gain, prizefighting can be viewed as a professional pursuit, although very few prizefighters earned their living at it. While English gentlemen in the early 1800s saw the boxer as the epitome of heroic and patriotic masculinity, boxing also allowed "a transgressive relationship to 'low life' customs and practices" (Pointon, 1996, p. 36). This suggests that while boxing was enjoyed as a spectacle by the gentry, it was also understood as a lower-class pursuit. The 1800s also begins a strong gendering of the sport, as men's fights were entertaining to the

upper-classes, in part because of the belief that "England had already reached the stage of effeminacy, [and that] sports [such] as boxing might help stop the decline" (Gorn, 1986, p. 30). Women's participation had to be marginalized at this time in order to further prevent this decline into effeminacy. According to Gorn, men's bare-knuckle prizefighting also moved underground around 1825. The increasing power of the middle-class and the change to evangelical values was the impetus for increased prosecution of fighters, seconds, and spectators, which forced the sport underground. During the Victorian era, prizefighting was looked down upon as a lower-class, barbaric activity (Chandler, 1996). This was in part due to the blood-letting that often accompanied it, but may also have been due to the professionalism of the activity. With amateur sport growing as a middle-class and upper-class pursuit that precluded (sometimes explicitly) the participation of working-class people, professional sports were given a bad name (Kidd, 1996).

The legitimation of prizefighting as a sport began with the introduction of rules by Jack Broughton in 1734 (Greig, 1996). These then changed to the London Prize Ring Rules, and later to the Marquess of Queensbury rules, which remain substantially unchanged to this day (Greig, 1996; Sammons, 1988). The motivating force behind this change was the privileging of what is thought to be a more civilized way of participating. In fact, the adoption of the Marquess of Queensbury rules was an attempt to appeal to enthusiasts from the upper classes (Chandler, 1996). The increase in codification, and the standardization of the rounds, was put forward as being more civilized. The implementation of weight categories, the structuring of the time of rounds, and the

wearing of gloves, was commonly thought to make the activity safer, although many people have now refuted this (Chandler, 1996; Sammons, 1988).

Prizefighting, even under the new rules, was still considered a barbaric activity (see ethical objections to boxing in articles such as Davis, 1994; Parry, 1998). In the United States many states passed legislation prohibiting prizefights as inciting public disobedience. While professional boxing stemmed from bare-knuckle prizefighting, prior to any form of amateur boxing existing, amateur boxing began as a ruse to allow professional boxing to continue in the United States following its prohibition. Men's 'sparring competitions' and 'glove matches' were allowed, provided they occurred within an amateur athletic club. This led to the creation of amateur clubs, whose sole purpose was to hold men's professional boxing matches (Sammons, 1988). Women's matches, which had occurred frequently in prize rings, were eliminated from the amateur pursuit, although women's bouts continued as underground prizefights (Hargreaves, 1996). While this unusual relationship between amateur and professional does not continue today, the historical relationship between the two versions of the sport blurs the line of distinction between them, as well as functioning to render contemporary amateur boxing almost invisible.

This unusual history leads to the conflation of all boxing with professional boxing, and more specifically men's professional boxing, even though women participate in both amateur and professional boxing. It is interesting that while women's participation in professional boxing/ prize-fighting has been documented back to 1720 (Hargreaves, 1996; Park, 1994), the year after the start of documentation of modern men's pugilism - 1719 (Fleischer & Andre, 1959; Odd, 1983; Sugar, 1981), women's

participation is still commonly thought of as a new phenomenon[4]. This 'newness' allows for the sport to be marginalized, as a new sport must be given time to grow. Walcott (1999) attacks similar logic used to further racism in Canada. As he points out, black Canadians are not a recent phenomenon, yet they are commonly thought of as such. Racism is allowed to continue under the cover of things having improved somewhat, and the need for time to allow things to change further. The marginalization of female boxers works within a similar argument; the acceptance of women will come with time, look at how far we have come in the few years that women have boxed. This logic fails to hold up when the observation is made that women have been boxing for three hundred years.

If boxing means men's professional boxing, then only men who fight professionally are seen as boxers. This narrow portrayal is further reinforced within popular culture by films, television, novels, and some academic work. The trope of the boxer is then further narrowed to the common understanding of "The rags to riches narrative, in which the deprived, marginalized figure traverses the barriers of class and race through physical prowess to assume hero status and vast wealth" (Chandler, 1996, p. 17), where the boxer must also be "a gendered being embodying and exemplifying a definite form of masculinity: plebeian, heterosexual, and heroic" (Wacquant, 1995, p. 90). Whereas the boxer is privileged within boxing discourse, he is "a special underclass"

[4] Ancient men's prize fighting can be traced back as far as 1184 B.C. (Miles, 1880). While women's participation in the sport cannot be traced back that far, it cannot simply be assumed that they did not compete. Many of the copious volumes written on the history of modern pugilism (Fleischer & Andre, 1959; Gorn, 1986; Hartley, 1988; Miles, 1880; Odd, 1983; Pointon, 1986; Sammons, 1988; Sugar, 1981) leave out the history of female competitors. The absence of women from these 'historical' texts could lead to the assumption that women did not compete in prize fighting during the time frames that these books cover, however that is not the case. I would argue that the lack of documentation of women's participation in ancient times is an effect of patriarchy and misogynist practices, not an indication of their absence from the sport.

(Chandler, 1996, p. 17) in relation to other discourses that privilege a white masculinity that is both rational and civil.

Methodology

The production of 'the boxer' is a totalizing identity that results in a discourse that seems to unproblematically incorporate all participants in the sport. This discourse acts to constrain who may or may not be understood as 'the boxer'. As Butler (1990) states: "The domains of political and linguistic "representation" set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject" (p. 4). 'The boxer' is a subject position for participants to occupy, and only those who occupy the subject position may be (re)presented in the discourse. So while the act of punching another within a boxing ring might be a requirement of the understanding of a person to be 'the boxer', it is not the sole requirement (or possibly a requirement at all). For example, Muhammad Ali is still spoken of as a boxer even though he hasn't entered the ring in over twenty years. Henry Tillman, a former Olympic gold medallist, was spoken of as a boxer when he was tried for murder in February 2000, even though he had retired from boxing in 1992 (May, 2000). The 'boxer', in order to be understood in this subject position, the 'boxer', must conform to the rules of the boxing discourse.

It is in conforming to the rules of the discourse that the boxer is constituted by that discourse. As Carabine (2001) points out "To understand discourse we have to see it as intermeshed with power/knowledge where knowledge both constitutes and is constituted through discourse as an effect of power" (p. 275). This allows discourses to

define 'truth' about a particular topic at a particular historical time (Carabine, 2001; Foucault, 1980). These 'truths' can then be used to normalize behaviour because as Carabine (2001) notes: "They have outcomes/identifiable effects which specify what is morally, socially, and legally un/acceptable at any given moment in a culture" (p. 274). In this way, the discourse about boxing is able to construct a particular version of the boxer as real.

Discourse analysis offers me a way to expose the structures that produce and maintain the trope of the boxer. Moreover, by exposing the discourse to be a production and not an accurate depiction of a single truth, I might achieve Taylor's (2001b) goals of debunking the status quo, with "practical and significant consequences" (p. 325).

The way that the boxer is portrayed is not only a representation of a legitimated discourse; it is also a way of constituting the boxer as this representation. As Hall (1986) points out:

> Because there are many different and conflicting ways in which meaning about the world can be constructed, it matters profoundly what and who gets represented, *what* and *who* regularly and routinely gets left out; and *how* things, people, events, relationships are represented. (p. 9, emphasis in original)

Discourse analysis allows me to examine "how language constructs phenomena, not how it reflects and reveals it. In other words, discourse analysis views discourse as constitutive of the social world – not a route to it – and assumes that the world cannot be known separately from discourse" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 6). The subject 'the boxer', then is not only represented by the way in which it is spoken about, but the actions and

behaviours of the person in the subject position are constrained (both limited and enabled) and constituted by the language used. This representation, then, constitutes the 'how' of the boxer: the way in which the boxer comes to be understandable as a 'what'. It is this 'how' of the boxer in which I am interested.

> There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the "we" cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds – and fails to proceed. (Butler, 1993, p. 124)

The repetition or resignification that occurs within the representation of the boxer works in the way Butler describes. The individual exercises agency, therefore showing that s/he is not determined by the construction (or representation), but only in so far as the constraints of language allow.

Language constrains our actions, not only by limiting them, but also by enabling them. "Constraints are often thought to be restrictions imposed by someone who possesses more power and who uses these constraints to limit the actions of others who have less or no power. Foucault argued that power is never wholly limiting" (Shogan, 1999, pp. 3-4). In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault (1975/1995) urges us: "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it

produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (p. 194). In the production of things, power acts to both enable and limit behaviour. One way in which power works is through language. Thus, language acts to constrain behaviour by both limiting and enabling action.

As Taylor (2001a) notes "The basic assumption here is that the language available to people enables and [limits] not only their expression of certain ideas but also what they do" (p. 9). Therefore, the way that the boxer is represented in language, whether that language is used by an athlete, a sportswriter, or a filmmaker, constrains (by enabling and limiting) the way a person behaves. For this reason it is important to understand "the language user not as a free agent but as one who is heavily constrained in her or his choice of language and action, even if these are not fully determined" (Taylor, 2001a, p. 10). Mike Tyson is an excellent example of this. While his behaviour is not fully determined, he is still constrained in how he may behave because of this discourse. Piper (1996) has drawn parallels between fighters of different eras to show that Tyson's behaviour is not fully self-determined, but that "Beyond Tyson's apparently faithful replaying of Sonny Liston's 'bad nigger' theme, lurks an even darker scenario which would appear to link him to the 'black menace' that was Jack Johnson" (p. 77)[5].

Popular culture provides a venue for the reiteration of this discourse both to the boxer and to the general public. Because the boxer is constrained by the available language, public representations of the boxer become especially important in how individual boxers may produce themselves. In analyzing rape discourse, Moorti (2002) notes that when news media "attempts to provide an "objective" account of events relating to [race, gender, and sexuality], it ends up reproducing bipolarized hegemonic

[5] For a more in depth discussion of Mike Tyson see Chapter 2: She Sure Can Hit: Boxing With Gender.

understandings" (p. 32). This kind of "objectivity" also contributes to the production of a normative view of the boxer, as the hegemonic language used by the media constrains the language available to individuals and facilitates the understanding of this language as "truth".

According to Hall (1998), "The cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent; and by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture" (p. 447). So while the language user has choices to make when speaking about or constructing an object (in this case 'the boxer'), the options available are not equal. As Edley (2001) notes, certain ways of understanding become culturally dominant: "That is, they can assume the status of facts, taken for granted as true or accurate descriptions of the world" (p. 190). The way that the sportswriter, novelist, or filmmaker represents 'the boxer' works to constrain the language available for the athletes to produce themselves. In turn, the language available to the sportswriter, novelist and filmmaker is also constrained by the historical representations available. As Fiske (1998) explains, the cultural economy's "commodities, which we call 'texts', are not containers or conveyers of meaning and pleasure, but rather *provokers* of meaning and pleasure" (p. 508). The imposition of language and meaning has real, material effects, "even if these are neither all-powerful nor all-inclusive" (Hall, 1998, p. 447).

The texts that I use in this analysis have three distinct audiences. These are: the general public, which may include academics and sport participants, although not exclusively; the sporting audience, which includes athletes, coaches, other boxing experts (such as officials, or sportswriters) and fans; and academic audiences. Texts that are

intended for a general audience include films, novels, and news media material that is not within the sports section. Media coverage that is published within sports magazines, sport sections of the newspaper and sport specific websites are geared to the sporting audience. Academic works include books or journal articles that are written for consumption within the academy. The texts I am interesting in are those that discuss particular boxers, or the sport of boxing more generally.

My main interest in these different texts is to look for commonalities and differences in the representation of different boxers within and through different kinds of texts. I analyse these texts using discourse analysis and deconstruction.

Discourse Analysis

> Discourse analysis subverts and challenges taken-for-granted understandings and undermines the tendency to reify and solidify knowledge. From a discourse perspective, all versions of social reality are social constructions held in place by ongoing processes of discursive production. There are no "true" representations of reality from which one can critique other, somehow less real, versions. Although some versions are more legitimate and held in place by more powerful processes, they are all equally products of human interaction and subject to the same dynamics. (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 84)

Following Phillips & Hardy, I understand the boxer to be a discursive production. The legitimized version of this production is the trope that has become understood as the reality of the boxer. I propose to use discourse analysis to study boxing, because I wish to

show that what is (re)presented as the "true" version of the boxer is a social construction that is held in place by oppressive hegemonic discourses. I believe that discourse analysis is the most appropriate vehicle for my inquiry because as Phillips & Hardy (2002) note: "Whereas other qualitative methodologies work to understand or interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis endeavors to uncover the way in which it is produced" (p. 6). In uncovering the processes that legitimate one representation over another, I attempt to open a dialogue about boxing in order to allow for a richer, more complex understanding of these athletes and their sport.

Deconstruction

In looking at the way that certain athletes are subsumed within the boxing discourse, specific Derridian ideas, such as the supplement, presence and absence, and *sous rature* (under erasure) allow for a more complex reading. As Spivak (1997) notes: "a certain view of the world, of consciousness, and of language has been accepted as the correct one, and, if the minute particulars of the view are examined, a rather different picture (that is also a no-picture…) emerges" (p. xiii). It is this kind of examination of the boxer that I use to create a different (no-)picture of boxers.

By looking at the representation of 'the boxer', I am interested in how the 'absent presence' stands as the signified. As Neel (1988) writes, "Any process of signification begins only because something is absent" (p. 151). But absence, according to Derrida (1967/1997) is not the opposite or negating of presence; absence precedes and enables presence. This allows me to discuss not only the representation of 'the boxer', but also 'the boxer' as the presence of boxing. In using this kind of representation and

sign/signified, I am able to expose 'the boxer' as a discursive production, and not an accurate depiction of any particular person.

When a boxer endangers the boxing discourse by showing the stereotype to not adequately describe a boxer, the intersections of the characteristics that make up the coherent entity of the boxer are shifted to allow the encapsulation of the athlete[6]. This shifting of intersections works to silence particular aspects of a person in order to allow the person to remain a subject of the particular discourse.

Within boxing the discourse requires heterosexual masculinity to be embodied by the male boxer, without an explicit mention of his sexuality. A homosexual male boxer would be understandable within the discourse only if his sexuality was silenced, so that he could be read as embodying a heterosexual masculinity. Who he sleeps with is not an issue, but the appearance of his sexuality is. As long as this remains silent (or hidden), then he will be read as heterosexual. This silencing of his sexuality allows him to be encapsulated within the discourse. As Foucault (1976/1990) noted, "there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (p. 27). These silences function as "a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide relatively obscure areas of tolerance" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 101). The silencing of particular characteristics allow for the interpretation of a person who may otherwise be unintelligible within the discourse. However, not all persons may be made understandable within the subject position of 'the boxer'.

A homosexual male boxer is tolerated, only in so far as his sexuality does not threaten the power structure. By silencing his sexuality, he helps to strengthen the notion

[6] This shifting is discussed in detail in Chapter 4: Queering Boxing: Boxing Queer.

that all boxers are heterosexual. At the same time, however, this boxer also helps to dispel the notion that all boxers are heterosexual, as he is not. This makes the silence of his sexuality both underpin the dominant discourse, as well as permeating it in a way that could help to loosen its hold.

Another way to discuss this silencing is to use Derrida's notion of *sous rature* (Sim, 1999). The silent aspect must be present in order to be silent; however it also must be *under erasure (sous rature).* For example, the "female boxer" must obviously be female; however, her sex makes her unintelligible within boxing discourse. If her sex is put under erasure, as in the case of a black woman[7], she becomes understandable as her sex is read as ~~female~~. By striking through her sex, her sex must already be present, but silenced.

Conclusion

Within this thesis, I explore how this representation of the boxer as trope constrains, by both limiting and enabling, those who participate in the sport based on gender, race, national identity, and sexuality. By using post-structural theorizing and deconstruction, this thesis shows some of the flaws and limitations of the current dominant discourse about boxing. In this I follow Taylor's (2001b) idea that "**critique** is not an abstract activity but has practical and significant consequences" (p. 325, emphasis in original). Not the least of these consequences "is to discredit the *status quo*, especially by challenging established authorities and debunking accepted wisdoms" (Taylor, 2001b,

[7] In this I am following the idea of Biddy Martin (1996) that blackness is associated with phallic traces in women, thus putting their sex under erasure.

p. 326, emphasis in original). It is my intention to open up a dialogue that will allow for different ways of speaking about boxing and boxers.

Papers

The papers that follow interrogate different aspects of the representation of boxing and boxers. The first paper looks at the conflation of the athlete with the sport, and how that reinforces the construction of gender within boxing. The second paper explores how the stereotype of boxing discourse is incommensurate with nationalist discourse in Canada. The third paper delves into queer theory and how the dominant discourse about boxing allows for a queer reading of all boxers. The presence of bodies that can be queered within boxing in turn allows for the questioning of both the boxing discourse and a hegemonic social standard. The dominant boxing discourse is problematic in many ways. Because the constraints on boxers and would-be-boxers occur from many different angles, these three papers attack the discourse in different ways.

References

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Carabine, J. (2001). Unmarried motherhood 1830-1990: A genealogical analysis. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates, (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: A Guide For Analysis,* (pp. 267 - 310). London, UK: Sage and the Open University.

Chandler, D. (1996). Introduction: The pictures of boxing. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture*, (pp. 13 - 25). London, UK: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Davis, P. (1994). Ethical issues in boxing. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport, XX-XXI,* 48-63.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Of Grammatology: Corrected Edition.* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis,* (pp. 189 - 228). London, UK: Sage and the Open University.

Fiske, J. (1998). The popular economy. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Cultural Theory & Popular Culture: A Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 504 – 521). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Fleischer, N., & Andre, S. (1959). *A Pictorial History of Boxing*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975).

Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction.* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976)

Foucault, M. (1980). Two lectures. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977 By Michel Foucault* (pp. 78 - 108). New York: Pantheon Books.

Gilman, S. (1997). The deep structure of stereotypes. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 284 - 285). London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.

Gorn, E. J. (1986). *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Greig, M. (1996). *Goin' the Distance: Canada's Boxing Heritage*. Toronto, Canada: Macmillan Canada.

Hall, S. (1998). Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Cultural Theory & Popular Culture: A Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 442 – 453). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Hall, S. (1997). Chapter 4: The spectacle of the 'other'. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 223 - 279). London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.

Hall, S. (1986). Media power and class power. In J. Curran, J. Ecclestone, G. Oakley, and A. Richardson (Eds.), *Bending Reality: The State of the Media* (pp. 5 – 14). London, UK: Pluto Press.

Hargreaves, J. (1996). Bruising Peg to boxerobics: Gendered boxing – images and meanings. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture*, (pp. 121 – 131). London, UK: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Hartley, R. A. (1988). *History & Bibliography of Boxing Books: Collectors Guide to the History of Pugilism*. Alton, UK: Nimrod Press.

Kidd, B. (1996). *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Martin, B. (1996). *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian*. New York: Routledge.

May, H. (2000, February 13). DeWit vs. Tillman – again: One won gold, the other won the real prize. *Calgary Herald*, p. A12.

Miles, H. D. (1880). *Pugilistica: The History of British Boxing*. London, UK: Weldon & Co.

Moorti, S. (2002). *Color of Rape: Gender and Race in Television's Public Spheres*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Neel, J. (1988). *Plato, Derrida, and Writing*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Odd, G. (1983). *Encyclopedia of Boxing*. Cordoba, Spain: Hamlyn.

Park, R. (1994). From "Genteel Diversions" to "Bruising Peg": Active pastimes, exercise, and sports for females in late 17th- and 18th-Century Europe. In D. M. Costa, & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives*, (pp. 27 – 43). Windsor, Canada: Human Kinetics.

Parry, J. (1998). Violence and aggression in contemporary sport. In M. McNamee, & J. Parry (Eds.), *Ethics and Sport* (pp. 205 - 224), London, UK: E & FN Spon.

Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Piper, K. (1996). Four corners: A contest of opposites. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture*, (pp. 71 - 79). London, UK: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Pointon, M. (1996). Pugilism, painters and national identity in early nineteenth-century England. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture*, (pp. 35 - 41). London, UK: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Sammons, J. (1988). *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Shogan, D. (1999). *The Making of High Performance Athletes: Discipline, Diversity, and Ethics*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Sim, S. (1999). *Postmodern Encounters: Derrida and the End of History*. Cambridge, UK: Icon Books.

Spivak, G. (1997). Translator's preface. In J. Derrida's (1967) *Of Grammatology: Corrected Edition*. G. C. Spivak (Trans.) (pp. ix - lxxxvii) Baltimore, MD: The John's Hopkins University Press.

Sugar, B. R. (Ed.) (1981). *The Ring: Record Book and Boxing Encyclopedia*. Plympton, MA: McClellan and Stewart Ltd.

Taylor, S. (2001a). Locating and conducting discourse analytic research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates, (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: A Guide For Analysis*, (pp. 5 - 48). London, UK: Sage and the Open University.

Taylor, S. (2001b). Evaluating and applying discourse analytic research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates, (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: A Guide For Analysis*, (pp. 311 - 330). London, UK: Sage and the Open University.

Wacquant, L. (1995). Pugs at work: Bodily capital and bodily labour among professional boxers. *Body and Society, 1*(1), 65-94.

Walcott, R. (1999). "Keep on movin": Rap, black Atlantic identities and the problem of nation. In L. Van Luven & P. L. Walton (Eds.), *Pop Can: Popular Culture in Canada*, (pp. 27-41). Scarborough, Canada: Prentice Hall.

Chapter 2

She Sure Can Hit: Boxing with Gender[1]

Beginnings

> Coherent theories in an obviously incoherent world are either silly and uninteresting or oppressive and problematic, depending upon the degree of hegemony they manage to achieve. Coherent theories in an *apparently* coherent world are even more dangerous, for the world is always more complex than such unfortunately hegemonious theories can grasp. (Harding, 1986, p. 164)

The meaning of boxing is solidified within a masculinist framework that suggests that boxing and maleness are irrevocably linked (Chandler, 1996; Oates, 1987; Plimpton, 1977; Sugden, 1998; Wacquant, 1995). Blackness, youth, poverty, and a lack of education are also conceptualised as constituting the boxer (Oates, 1987; Piper, 1996; Sugden, 1998; Wacquant, 1995). This discourse attempts to reduce the boxer (and boxing), to a coherent entity, who can be unproblematically encapsulated within it. The entry of female athletes into boxing exposes the inability of this seemingly unified discourse to capture the complexity of boxing and those who box. According to Butler (1990), "[d]iscourse becomes oppressive when it requires that the speaking subject, in order to speak, participate in the very terms of that oppression – that is, take for granted the speaking subject's own impossibility or unintelligibility" (p. 147). A female boxer is

[1] A version of this chapter has been submitted for publication to the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*.

impossible within the current discourse, leaving her only a marginalized position from which to speak[2].

By post-structurally critiquing this hegemonic discourse, I show how binary language, in relation to gender, fails and, in so doing, I show the dominant discourse on boxing to be, in Harding's (1986) words, "dangerous and problematic". While I will offer other ways to speak about gender, I do not offer them as essential truths that are capable of capturing reality. I offer them merely as alternative conceptualisations of gender, a new "final vocabulary"[3] (Rorty, 1989, p. 73), which may enable us to engage in a dialogue that is hopefully less oppressive or problematic. I do not wish to disrupt the discourse so that it may expand to allow the subjectification of those currently unintelligible within the discourse. As Spivak (1990) writes: "'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?' [...] the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously" (pp. 59-60). With this in mind, it is not my intention to give voice to those currently unable to intelligibly speak, but rather to suggest alternate ways to listen, so that those who wish to speak may be listened to seriously. While some may wish to critique this as providing yet another meta-narrative, another coherent discourse with its own distinct oppressions, I offer these as suggestions that do not "capture" reality, but as a new ironic dialogue that will allow for "gradual, tacit substitutions of a new vocabulary for an old one" (Rorty, 1989, p. 77).

---

[2] By "speak", I do not mean only the act of talking, but also the way people present themselves, or appear. Through different kinds of expressions people "speak" themselves into being as particular kinds of people, for example, a hyper-feminine gay man or a female business executive.

[3] Rorty (1989) defines final vocabulary as "a set of words which [all human beings] employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. [...] It is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force" (p. 73).

The Dominant Discourse of Boxing

Discourse around boxing has been solidified in popular culture, such as films, and novels, as well as in some academic writing. Movies like *When We Were Kings* (Sonenberg, Gast, & Hackford, 1996), *Girlfight* (Green, Griffin, & Renzi, 2000), and *The Human Stain* (Rosenberg, Lucchesi, & Steindorff, 2002) seem to be subverting the dominant discourse about boxing and boxers, while arguably, they continue to strengthen the stereotype. Books such as *On Boxing* (Oates, 1987) and *Ghosts of Manila* (Kram, 2001) offer the familiar image of stupid, uneducated, poor, young, black men prostituting themselves through boxing to overcome financial obstacles. Some academic writing falls into the same traps, with researchers doing ethnographies in boxing clubs, reiterating these same stereotypes (Mennesson, 2000; Sugden, 1998; Wacquant, 1995).

The solidification of the discourse that occurs when films superficially seem to be breaking down the dominant discourse is especially problematic, because these films make the world *seem* coherent. Superficial attempts to subvert the discourse usually involve changing an aspect of the main character type in order to make the character appear less stereotypical. In *The Human Stain* (Rosenberg, et al, 2002) for example, the main character is young, black, poor, and trying to get an education. His father is against him boxing because he feels that it is beneath him. The boy's family expects him to go to Howard University, but boxing offers him the opportunity to pass as white and get a scholarship to a more prestigious, white university[4]. Superficially, the character seems to be sensitive, intelligent, and sophisticated, certainly not the persona of black masculinity that we expect to find in the ring. Under the surface, however, we find a character that is

[4] The character has black parents, but he has very light coloured skin, which allowed him to pass as white, when presented as such by his white boxing manager.

willing to turn his back on his family, his past, and his 'race' to live the rest of his life passing as white. We also find that the character tries to embody black masculine traits in attempting to physically fight his girlfriend's estranged, insane husband, and by refusing to ask for help when his job is threatened. This physical aggression is shown only in a couple of incidents with the estranged husband however, it is the idea that this articulate, rational, self-controlled individual reverts to physically aggressive fisticuffs with little concern for the well-being of himself or his rival, that eventually plays into the typical stereotype of the naturally aggressive, violent boxer. While the barrier that this character is breaking is not merely financial, he still uses boxing as a way to overcome obstacles, in his case blackness and education. This reinforces the notion that boxing is a means to an end, a way out of the obstacles that oppressed people face, and that boxers are naturally aggressive, violent individuals.

The film sustains the stereotype that all who participate must be downtrodden, oppressed, fighting for their piece of the pie, fighting for their masculinity. "The rags to riches narrative, in which the deprived, marginalized figure traverses the barriers of class and race through physical prowess to assume hero status and vast wealth is a central pillar of boxing lore" (Chandler, 1996, p. 17). The boxer is seen within popular culture as either the hero or the loser, but as Chandler (1996) explains there really is not a significant difference between them:

> This is manifest in the boxer's often haunted presence in visual culture, and especially in film, as a figure of profound melancholy; at once a hero and malleable victim, at the mercy of both conspiring promoters and managers and a fickle, braying public. There is a poignancy to his efforts

> as a fighter. He only wins to fight again; in transcending temporarily the exigencies of the physical contest he is also propelled towards eventual defeat. There is an inevitability about his decline, physically, mentally and socially. (p. 17)

We need to move beyond understanding sport as merely a site to reproduce hegemonic masculinity. Through sport, boys are taught to behave in a "particular way of being male that we know as manliness" (Whitson, 1990, p. 21). The boxer especially seems to embody masculinity because, according to Hargreaves (1996), the ideology of sport states that, "boxing is an essentially masculine activity, associated with the male physique and psychology, and with no organic connection with femaleness" (p. 125). Masculinity is what the fighter is trying to achieve by winning the fight (Oates, 1987; Wacquant, 1995), although the boxer is also understood as embodying a black masculinity. Boxing is seen as the way for an oppressed fighter to prove his worth as a man. This makes the boxer "a gendered being embodying and exemplifying a definite form of masculinity: plebeian, heterosexual, and heroic" (Wacquant, 1995, p. 90). "In this world, strength of a certain kind – matched of course with intelligence and tirelessly developed skills – determines masculinity. Just as a boxer is his body, a man's masculinity is his use of his body" (Oates, 1987, p. 72).

Masculinity is maintained within boxing by associating forceful, aggressive behaviours with being a man. It also helps to reify the idea that women are 'naturally' inferior to men, by valuing physical power, assertiveness, and confidence, qualities that are considered in Oates' (1987) words, "the peculiar province of men" (p. 73).

Masculinity is also commonly defined by what is "not feminine, or, more bluntly, not effeminate" (Craib, 1987, p. 721).

Within the logic that masculinity belongs solely to male bodies and that boxing is quintessentially masculine, boxing can only be understood as male.[5] While this appears to be refuted by women such as Laila Ali or Jaqui Frazier-Lyde, both of whom are recognised as "female boxers", their recognition invokes the supplementarity of their fathers (Derrida, 1967/1973). These two women are recognizable because of the spectre of their fathers; they cannot stand alone within the dominant discourse about boxing. Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier are legendary boxers with exemplary narratives, thereby lending legitimacy to their daughters in this sport. Both men are always invoked when their daughters are mentioned. They are the "absent presence"; it is not possible for the spectre of the father to be removed from the daughter. Laila and Jaqui are intelligible only through Ali and Frazier's intelligibility. The media response to these two women has been overwhelming, and many believe that it is due to the "extra ingredient" their fathers' names give them (Wban, 2004a). While Laila Ali is currently ranked in the top two fighters in her weight division by the International Female Boxers Association (IFBA), the Women's International Boxing Association (WIBA), and the Women Boxing Archive Network (WBAN) computer ratings (Wban, 2004b), this is due to her recent maturity as a boxer, and came after the fame, endorsements and media frenzy generated by the supplementary of her father's name (Wban, 2004a). The absent presence of the father

[5] Male is used here to denote sex. It is not merely that boxing is masculine, or that there is a manliness that could be performed by a female body, it is that boxing, within the dominant discourse, is seen to be biologically male, and therefore exclusionary of the female body.

allows the silencing[6] of Laila and Jaqui's gender, enabling them to be read through the masculinity and maleness of their fathers. On the other hand, Ann Wolfe and Marsha Valley, two fighters who are respectively ranked ahead of Ali and Frazier-Lyde by the IFBA and WBAN, are not readily recognized by non-boxing fans, nor do they have the endorsements or command similar purses as Ali and Frazier-Lyde. Without the supplement of the male boxer legitimating their position in the sport, Wolfe and Valley are unintelligible within boxing discourse.

Boxing discourse appears coherent; boxing is masculine, men are masculine, therefore boxers are masculine men. The apparent coherence of the discourse about boxing, in a world created by the discourse to appear coherent, forecloses any attempts to make sense of boxing in different ways. By aligning masculinity with maleness, and by creating boxing as a competition for masculinity, the discourse around boxing proves itself tautologically. It is not possible for boxing to be thought of as other than masculine, and therefore it is also not possible for it to be other than male.

This masculinist discourse produces the boxing world in a way that posits an origin that appears prediscursive. The discourse appears to be merely descriptive of a world that exists naturally and ahistorically. That boxing allows boys to behave in a "particular way of being male that we know as manliness" (Whitson, 1990, p. 21), helps not only to prove the tautology, but also to suggest that this 'manliness' is a 'natural' male quality. By understanding masculinity as a trait that should be naturally embodied

---

[6] In this, I am referring to Foucault's (1976/1990) notion of silence. In order to be silenced, their gender must be present. By suggesting that their gender is silenced, I am implicitly stating that they are female, but that this is 'under erasure' (as Derrida termed it, *sous rature* (Sim, 1999)); it is as if their gender had a line drawn through it by the gendering the supplement provides. Their gender is then seen as female. As Spivak (1997) describes it: "Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible" (p. xiv).

by male bodies, gender appears to stem from a biological characteristic that one is born with. The traits that comprise masculinity can then be seen as natural when performed by the male body, and deviant and inauthentic when performed by the female body. If these traits belong biologically to the male, then the discourse around boxing is merely descriptive of these naturally occurring characteristics; thus, making the boxing world seem prediscursive.

The Conflation of the Sport and the Athlete

Boxing differs from other sports labelled as masculine because of the conflation of the athlete with the sport. The athlete is considered the sport and the sport the athlete in a way that is arguably not seen in other sports. Team sports are separated from the athlete because of the need for the team. While some people may think that Wayne Gretzky *is* hockey, hockey cannot *be* Wayne Gretzky in the same way that Mike Tyson *is* boxing and boxing *is* Tyson. Gretzky requires a team, not only to win the game, but also to play the sport. So, while his play can be seen as possibly representative of excellence, it cannot be seen as encapsulating the entirety of the sport in the same manner that the boxer can be the presence of boxing.

Mike Tyson's behaviour inside or outside of the ring is seen as a reflection of the sport of boxing. As Oates (2003) puts it, "he seemed to invite his fate outside the ring, with sadomasochistic persistence, testing the limits of his celebrity's license to offend by escalating acts of aggression and sexual effrontery" (¶4). Sugden (1998) questions "to what extent was Tyson's success in the ring dependent upon his social inadequacies outside of it" (p. 55). Both writers seem to point to Tyson's social inadequacies as being

responsible for his successful boxing career. This same discourse can be seen at play in the way that Bernard Hopkins speaks himself into the appropriate role of the boxer before his title fight against Oscar de La Hoya. By aligning himself with Marvin Hagler, a fighter depicted as the poverty-stricken 'hungry' fighter, versus de La Hoya, one of the richest fighters of all time, Hopkins invokes the upward mobility myth of the boxer as being the most important factor in who will prevail. Before the fight Hopkins was quoted as saying, "You give me a rich fighter and a hungry fighter and I'm going with the hungry fighter every time" (Standard – Freeholder, 2004, p. 11). His knock out of de La Hoya can then be seen as a result, not of superior strength or skill, but as a reification of the myth that boxers must be trying to overcome the adversity of poverty.

Sloop (1997) writes of the discourse surrounding Tyson as creating a situation "in which Tyson, as a boxer, as African American, and as himself, is constructed rhetorically as naturally angry, persistently dangerous to all who enter his domain" (p. 103). Oates (2003) writes about Tyson, "that the violence he unleashes against his opponents is somehow just; that some hurt, some wound, some insult in his past, personal or ancestral, will be redressed in the ring; some mysterious imbalance righted" (¶3). This suggests that Tyson, qua African American, is 'naturally' a violent, aggressive individual who boxes in order to get revenge. It also suggests that Tyson's blackness makes him historically angry and aggressive, leading to his 'natural' need for violence. While Tyson might seem like a unique example, an ideal type, his behaviour, actions and demeanour are, according to Piper (1996), an accurate reiteration of Sonny Liston's 'bad nigger' theme, which, Piper argues, draws links back to the 'black menace' that was Jack Johnson (p. 77). This suggests that Tyson is, at least in part, constituted by the dominant discourse, and that he

speaks himself into the appropriate subject position, as well as being spoken into it. That other boxers have also been constituted in this way shows that Tyson is not a unique case, but is in fact merely an excellent example of the effects of the dominant discourse.

Tyson's behaviour appears to be tolerated by boxing as evidenced by the continual reinstatement of his boxing licence after each transgression for which it has been revoked. Mike Tyson is allowed to be violent and unethical, therefore the sport is seen to be violent and unethical. This helps to solidify the notion that boxing is "the most brutal of sports, its participants the most brutal of men, and Tyson perhaps the most brutal of all" (Sloop, 1997, p. 113).

When Mike Tyson bit a part of Evander Holyfield's ear off in the ring, it was seen as representative of boxing. On 28 June 1997, Mike Tyson committed what was termed a 'major foul'. This initial foul was understood as a part of boxing, as Tyson received a two-point deduction, and the fight then resumed. It was not until the end of the round in which Tyson had bitten Holyfield a second time that the fight was stopped, and Tyson disqualified. Tyson's disqualification was not actually due to the biting of the ear, but was the result of his receiving a second major foul in the fight, suggesting that his behaviour was considered, at least in some way, a part of boxing because the rules could accommodate it. This leads to an understanding of boxing as being 'controlled violence' and not 'sport' thereby making it unethical; those who participate then, must also be immoral – criminals, savages, and deviants.

While Tyson's violent and unethical behaviour is seen as a part of his sport, this was not the case when Marty McSorley struck Donald Brashear in the head with a hockey stick. During a National Hockey League (NHL) game on 21 February 2000,

Marty McSorley struck Donald Brashear, from behind, with a two-handed slash to the right side of Brashear's face, with 2.7 seconds remaining in the game. This was seen as symptomatic of the violence that was increasing in hockey, but not as a part of hockey itself. NHL Vice President Colin Campbell said, "This is not the way we want hockey portrayed. This gives hockey a bad name. This is not what hockey is all about. McSorley's act is unacceptable" (Wigge, 2000, ¶10). An NHL player, Mattias Ohlund stated that, "that guy should be treated as if he tried to kill a guy on the street" (Wigge, 2000, ¶8). Criminal charges for assault with a weapon were brought against McSorley, and the league handed down the longest suspension in its history for the attack, clearly showing that his behaviour was not considered part of hockey. McSorley was found guilty of the criminal charge, thus reiterating the notion that his behaviour was unrelated to his sport[7].

This conflation of the athlete and the sport in boxing is also different than in other individual sports. While Carl Lewis may be thought of as representative of the one hundred meter sprint, his behaviour, on or off the track, is not considered to be indicative of the sport. Boxing is made sense of as inherently requiring specific personality characteristics, such as aggression, violence, and a lack of concern for others' well being. The discourse then requires the boxer to have these qualities as personality traits, resulting in behaviour outside the ring that is considered aggressive and violent. Oates (2003) states that, "Tyson suggests a savagery only symbolically contained within the brightly illuminated elevated ring, with its referee, its resident physician, its scrupulously observed rules, regulations, customs, and rituals" (¶1). In representing Tyson as "savage",

[7] Another example of this within hockey is currently unfolding; Todd Bertuzzi's 8 March 2004 attack on Steve Moore is being treated in the same fashion, with criminal charges of assault causing bodily harm being brought against Bertuzzi on 24 June 2004. Bertuzzi's trial is set for January 2005.

Oates is complicit with colonialist discourses that set up African Americans as subordinate, less civilised beings. She is in effect calling into question any essence of humanity in Tyson, rendering him less than human. By stating that he can only be "symbolically contained" she suggests that he is more like a caged beast than a disciplined human athlete. She goes on, saying, "he has the power to galvanize crowds as if awakening in them the instinct not merely for raw aggression and the mysterious will to do hurt that resides, for better or worse, in the human soul, but for suggesting incontestable *justice* of such an instinct" (Oates, 2003, ¶1). This instinct apparently requires awakening in the more civilised (white) crowds, but is already at the surface of the (black) boxer.

It becomes a natural extension then to understand Mike Tyson's rape conviction as connected to boxing, while Kobe Bryant's arrest, also for the rape of a teenaged girl, is seen as not related to basketball. In fact Bryant is able to use basketball as an escape from his arrest, with the gym being "his sanctuary, his favorite place to hide" (O'Connor, 2003, ¶1), as basketball offers him some escape from the hypersexuality of his blackness. Tyson's guilt is seen as a reflection of his hypermasculine savagery that is required by boxing. The disbelief that Bryant would use force to have sex is a reaction to his being understood as the heir apparent to Michael Jordan (Arthur, November 15, 2002; Madani, 2003; Ullrich, 1999). While Bryant's blackness makes him susceptible to similar suggestions of hypersexuality as Tyson, the understanding of Bryant as akin to Jordan allows him to be seen with a similar floating racial signifier[8]. Bryant is therefore able to

[8] In this I am following the discussions surrounding the 'whiteness' of Michael Jordan, in particular the suggestion that Michael Jordan has changed race relations in basketball in America. Michael Jordan's blackness is put under erasure, making him able to be read as white, thus giving him a floating racial

be read in a similar fashion to Michael Jordan as an 'All-American' hero, putting his blackness under erasure (Andrews, 2001b). In this instance basketball is the vehicle that allows Bryant's blackness to be erased, but at the same time basketball does not become the sole encompassing identity of Bryant. This puts basketball in the position of being the reason Bryant is understood as innocent. The maintenance of innocence for basketball comes at the expense of Bryant if he is found guilty; Bryant will no longer be able to maintain his 'All-American' hero status and his blackness will become evident, resulting in a distancing of him from basketball (McDonald, 2001). If Bryant is innocent, he is innocent because of his blackness being put under erasure, making basketball responsible for his innocence; however, if Bryant is guilty, he becomes the generic bad black man, removing basketball from any culpability[9]. The fans' disbelief that Bryant could have committed this crime, in striking contrast to the belief that Mike Tyson was inevitably guilty (Sloop, 1997), serves to show the disparate representation of boxing and basketball.

The same can be said of Tonya Harding's attack on Nancy Kerrigan. The sport of ice-skating itself was not seen as culpable in Harding's behaviour, in fact Harding was depicted as an "unlady-like" outsider who never really belonged in "a rich girl's sport" (Courttv.com, 2002). Harding is labelled "white-trash" (Dykk, 1994; Todd, 1994), marking her with a distinct class; her behaviour is seen as appropriate, almost expected, further distancing her from ice-skating. The irony is Harding's move into professional boxing, where her class behaviour and subsequent racialization are seen as appropriate

---

signifier. It is floating, because the erasure can never be complete, but must always be occurring for him to be read this way. For a more thorough discussion of race relations in basketball see Andrews (2001a).

[9] This is not to suggest that basketball does not have other competing racial discourses, it does, however it is my assertion that Bryant is represented in media mainly within this particular racial discourse.

and indicative of a personality suited to boxing. A personality so appropriate that Jay Leno called her "The Great White Trash Hope" (Leno, quoted in Arthur, December 31, 2002), even though her boxing record does not suggest her ability to be any kind of "Hope". Tyson's behaviour (as well as Harding's) therefore can be seen as an extension of his personality, a personality required by boxing, while the allegedly criminal behaviour of other athletes is seen as aberrant individual behaviour that is not connected to their sports.

This conflation works in the reverse as well. While hockey is not Wayne Gretzky, boxing is Mike Tyson, or Muhammad Ali. This means that the discourse around the sport must be imprinted upon the athlete as well. Sportswriters, such as Mark Kram (2001) and Norman Mailer (Sonenberg, Gast, & Hackford, 1996), speak of Ali as unintelligent, a dupe of the Nation of Islam, and an inherently aggressive and violent person. In Kram's (2001) words, Ali was "no more a social force than Frank Sinatra. Nor was he especially complex [...] Today, [...] he would be looked upon as a contaminant, a chronic user of hate language and a sexual profligate" (pp. 2-3). Another sportswriter, George Plimpton (1977) writes of Cassius Clay's litany: "one rarely has the sense of the brain actually working but rather that it is engaged in rote, simply a recording apparatus playing back to an impulse" (p. 95). While not all writers have written of Ali in this derogatory manner, how he is represented depends on the writer's position within the discourse. Those who are a part of boxing's discourse, for example sportswriters, have a need to maintain the representation of the boxer as trope. On the other hand, some academics speak of Ali as being politically savvy and a "hero of the dispossessed and the anti-establishment crowd" (Sammons, 1988, p. xiii; see also Abdel-Shehid, 2003; Saeed, 2002). These academics

can speak of Ali in this way because they do not require that the boxing discourse be maintained; they have no need to maintain the boxer in a subordinate position, as they do not have a stake in the boxing discourse. As writers of critical social theory, these particular academics position themselves in opposition to this discourse. The sportswriter, however, has an interest in the discourse being maintained because his/her authority depends on it. The boxer must be seen to be unintelligent, or the coherence of the discourse becomes suspect, unseating the sportswriter from her/his position as expert.

The Masculinization of Boxing

The understanding of the boxer and the sport as being the same, one entirely constituting the other, helps strengthen the masculinist discourse.

> To enter the claustrophobic world of professional boxing even as a spectator is to enter what appears to be a distillation of the masculine world, empty now of women, its fantasies, hopes, and stratagems magnified as in a distorting mirror, or a dream.
>
> Here, we find ourselves through the looking-glass. Values are reversed, evaginated: a boxer is valued not for his humanity but for being a "killer," a "mauler," a "hitman," an "animal," for being "savage," "merciless," "devastating," "ferocious," "vicious", "murderous." (Oates, 1987, p. 74)

Oates' looking-glass reiterates the conflation of the athlete with the sport. Oates implicitly presents the boxer as trope. By invoking a colonial nostalgia, Oates not only reifies the notion of the boxer as less than human, but also solidifies the understanding of

the boxer as being black, poor, uneducated, unintelligent, violent, aggressive, and especially masculine. The seeming reversal of values results in reifying the idea that the boxer is, as Chandler (1996) termed it, of a "special underclass" (p. 17), distinctly different from those with more intelligence, education, and humanity.

This masculine underclass status is reconfirmed in the way that boxing clubs and gyms are portrayed in popular culture. In Schulberg's (1947) classic boxing novel the gym is written about as:

> A large stuffy, smoke-filled, hopeful, cynical, glistening-bodied world. The smells of this world are sour and pungent, a stale gamey odor blended of sweat and liniment, worn fight gear, cheap cigars and too many bodies, clothed and unclothed, packed into a room with no noticeable means of ventilation. (pp. 89-90)

This picture is also presented in academic work, such as Chandler's (1996) introduction to *Boxer: An Anthology of Writing on Boxing and Visual Culture*:

> The gym is dark, claustrophobic, reverent, hypnotic, sexual; a space of intersecting rhythms, sounds and images. [...] Here encapsulated is the primal urban territory of boxing, an overtly male preserve of grimy authenticity, a space defined as an organism, as one body. (p. 16)

These descriptions do more than merely discourage women from entering the world of boxing; the smell, the dirt, the homoeroticism can offer no space for the female body. Oates (1987) put this quite succinctly when she stated, "Boxing is a purely masculine activity and it inhabits a purely masculine world. [...] And although there are

female boxers – a fact that seems to surprise, alarm, amuse – women's role in the sport has always been extremely marginal" (p. 70). She continues her attack on the female interloper, stating:

> In any case, raw aggression is thought to be the peculiar province of men, as nurturing is the peculiar province of women. (The female boxer violates this stereotype and cannot be taken seriously – she is parody, she is cartoon, she is monstrous. Had she an ideology, she is likely to be a feminist.) (Oates, 1987, p. 73)

Where can the female boxer fit in this manly world created by the dominant discourse? How can she enter a world that must be closed to her? The world of boxing has been created as a space that cannot accept the female athlete. The female boxer threatens to destroy the seemingly coherent boxing world by attempting to be present in it. If as Hargreaves (1996) states: "[b]lood, bruises, cuts and concussion, which accompany boxing's intrinsic aggression, violence and danger, are popularly considered to be at odds with the essence of femininity" (p. 125), how can the female body participate?

The Incoherence of the Female Boxer

One way of making sense of the female boxer is to incorporate her into the masculinist discourse as Oates (1987) has done. The limitation of this approach is that it is either oppressive and problematic or silly and uninteresting (Harding, 1986). The notion of the female boxer as merely parody and not to be taken seriously occurs because Oates forces the female to speak in a discourse within which she cannot be a subject, letting her only be parody. As Butler (1990) put it:

> To speak within the system is to be deprived of the possibility of speech; hence, to speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot 'be' within the language that asserts it. (p. 148)

Historically, women have not been allowed to participate in 'masculine' sports (Cahn, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986). Griffin (1998) states that this is because, "[i]f women can be tough minded, competitive, and muscular too, then sport loses its special place in the development of masculinity for men" (p. 17). If sport is the place boys learn to be men than the female athlete would deeply challenge traditional gender roles. It is, therefore, not surprising that the female boxer would "face formidable resistance" (Miller, 2001, p. 18).

This resistance takes shape in the trivialization and marginalization of the female athlete's performance "as an inferior version of the 'real thing'" (Griffin, 1998, p. 17). The female athlete must not be serious, she must only be 'playing' at the sport, but as Oates (1987) stated "one doesn't *play* boxing" (p. 19). What effect does the female boxer have then? Hargreaves (1996) is unsure, suggesting that boxing might be "a subversive activity for women or an essentially assimilative process with a radical façade" (p. 131). Sugden (1998) posits women's participation in boxing as either representative of progressive gender equity or "an opportunity [for women] to share in the uncivilised barbarity of men" (p. 194); a question, which he feels, will require future debate. Miller (2001) says that the female athlete destabilizes the traditional ideology of masculine

superiority; Griffin (1998) feels that the female athlete forces us to question the naturalness of gender and gender roles.

If we accept Hargreaves' (1996) idea that female participation in boxing is essentially an assimilative process, then when the female boxer 'proves' her masculinity in the sport, in the same way that men are thought to, what does she become? Cahn (1994) and Lenskyj (1986) would both argue that she then is seen to 'become' a lesbian. This is due to the masculinization of the female athlete, with Palzkill (1990) describing the price paid by the athlete as "the denial of her own sex, and her personal definition as a neutral being. Her behaviour and whole person is described as masculine, and her sexuality as a woman is denied" (p. 225). This is in keeping with Wittig's (1993) idea that woman can only be defined within the heterosexual matrix, and therefore in relation to the heterosexual man. Woman's role in the heterosexual matrix is to be the object of the heterosexual man's desire, requiring woman to be feminine. The masculine female must not be feminine (by virtue of being masculine within the constraints of binary language), and therefore she violates her position in the heterosexual matrix. She cannot be defined as the object of the heterosexual man's desire, making her other than woman.

If we continue to follow this line of reasoning, is the masculinization of the female the only effect of her participation? Or, is boxing somehow changed by her entry? Miller (2001) claims that the female athlete "also poses threats to masculinity, precipitating male 'hysteria' and attempts by men to contain women's aspirations and resistance" (p. 108). If we follow Miller's (2001) and Griffin's (1998) ideas that the female athlete destabilizes gender, she must threaten masculinity if masculinity can only be read on male bodies. Her failure to be masculine, by virtue of having a female body,

suggests something even more insidious may be occurring. Is there a danger that what is read as her 'inherent' femininity will infect the sport, thereby feminizing it (Klasovec, 1995)?

According to Pronger (1990), men's sport is used to prove men's masculinity, thereby allowing gender to remain a myth that appears to be natural. The entry of the female into the sport brings the naturalness of gender into question. The femininity required of the apparently heterosexual female body is a contamination of the pure masculinity of the sport. The woman cannot be feminine and masculine at the same time (because of the conformation "to binary sexual differences that appear to be inevitable, even natural" (Berger, Wallis, & Watson, 1995, p. 4)), thereby calling into question the effect the sport has on her. If she remains feminine, then the sport must be seen to be feminized. Her effect, then, is to call into question the gendering of the sport itself.

Failure of Masculine/Feminine Binary Language

As Griffin (1998) questions, "If women can so easily develop these so-called masculine qualities, then what are the meanings of femininity and masculinity?" (p. 17) This could also be asked in another way; if sport is gendered based on the sex of the athlete participating, do masculine and feminine ultimately mean anything? If a sport has both male and female athletes, it must then be both masculine and feminine. This is not possible within binary language. If one must be either masculine or feminine, how can it be both?

If we then suggest that the sport is masculine when male athletes are present and feminine when female athletes are present, making it not actually both, but one or the

other at distinct moments, how does this impact on the meaning of masculine and feminine? We cannot then suggest that certain characteristics are masculine and other characteristics are feminine, as the athlete would be required to embody some of these characteristics, whether male or female. This would then suggest that masculine and feminine relate not to the characteristics performed by the body, but to the apparent sex of the body itself. What would then constitute masculine would be the male body, not any particular characteristics the male body performs, suggesting that sex and gender are the same.

If we then look to Butler's (1990) discussion on sexed bodies and gender, we see that the female boxer would be incoherent.

> The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls 'outside,' gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently. (Butler, 1990, p. 140)

The female boxer shows masculinity to be discursive. Her position 'outside' shows the masculinization of the sport to be a construction, not an inherent, natural category. Following this idea, we cannot merely assume that boxing is masculine and that masculine is restricted to male bodies.

> If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex. Consider the further consequence that if gender is something that one becomes – but can never be – then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort. (Butler, 1990, p. 143)

If we follow this line of reasoning through, then how we talk about sex and gender needs to be radically rethought.

One way to radically rethink the way we talk about gender is to consider definitions of masculinity that do not necessarily equate it with maleness (Halberstam, 1998; Martin, 1996). Halberstam points to "minority masculinity" and female masculinity as destabilizing to hegemonic masculinity, which is based on white middle-class heterosexual bodies. By showing that there are a myriad of different ways to be masculine, Halberstam calls into question the use of a normative single definition as the commonsensical 'truth' of masculinity. If it is possible for masculinity to be performed by racialized male or female bodies, heterosexual female bodies, homosexual female bodies, homosexual male bodies, and any other kind of body in relation to the performance of another body (Halberstam, 1998), then any apparently coherent theory about normative masculinity is nothing other than a metaphysical commonsensical truth, which shows itself as suspect by trying to prove itself as an essential natural truth (Rorty, 1989). As Rorty (1989) states, "commonsense":

> [I]s the watchword of those who unselfconsciously describe everything important in terms of the final vocabulary to which they and those around them are habituated. To be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in that final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative vocabularies. (p. 74)

By using different definitions of masculinity, definitions that allow masculinity to be read on a female body without the threat of deviancy, the female boxer can become coherent within a semblance of the dominant discourse. It would even be possible to make sense of the female boxer as attempting to achieve her own kind of masculinity; however, it would require the breaking down of the myth that sex and gender are the same. As previously argued, sex and gender within the dominant discourse about boxing are thought to be final ontological categories. While this would need to change, the idea that sex and gender would still be the same, only socially constructed or performative categories instead of biological, would also be limiting. The multiplicity of genders that I am suggesting here could not be encompassed within a theory that requires sex and gender to be the same; sex and gender might be inextricably linked, but not actually the same. For example, the overtly heterosexual female boxer who performs hyperfemininity outside of the boxing ring could not be said to be repetitively performing her gender in a way that would allow for her sex to be determined by her performance. She might be said to be performing a kind of masculinity within boxing that allows her to be understood as both female and masculine, while her behaviour outside of the sport shows her as female

and feminine. If sex and gender were the same, how would her particular version of masculinity be intelligible? The coherence of the female boxer would be contingent on the final vocabulary of the dominant discourse changing to accept these alternate vocabularies.

Another way to rethink gender is to look to the relationship between masculine and feminine put forward by Sandra Bern (1993). Bern describes the relationship between them as "orthogonal". Sedgwick (1995) describes orthogonal as "instead of being at opposite poles of the same axis, they are actually in different, perpendicular dimensions, and therefore are independently variable" (pp. 15-16). This interpretation allows the boxer to be both masculine and feminine, or any combination of masculine and feminine at the same time. By being perpendicular to each other, masculinity and femininity are created in four quadrants, allowing an individual to be in any of the four quadrants at any point in time (see Figure 2-1). This means that a body could be highly masculine and highly feminine, or minimally masculine and minimally feminine, or any combination of the two. Sedgwick suggests that other variables might also be independent in the same way, for example effeminacy, butchness, femmeness, and so on. She also suggests that this "dimension-n" might make factors such as race more widely representable.

The orthogonal relationship of masculine and feminine contains what is called a threshold effect (Sedgwick, 1995). The threshold works as a means to see that which was previously hidden from view. The crossing of the x-y intersection allows the x-axis to become visible in a way that previously it was not. In boxing, this means that the point where femininity crosses the x-axis of masculinity allows us to see the boxer as

embodying a degree of both masculinity and femininity. When the apparently heterosexual female boxer enters the ring, she brings with her an amount of femininity that shows the intersection with masculinity. This then shows how all boxers embody both masculine and feminine traits. Miller (2001) gives examples of this femininity being performed by male boxers in his descriptions of de La Hoya as unmanly and Tyson as showing feminine vulnerability[10].

The obviously lesbian boxer can also show this threshold effect. She cannot embody hegemonic masculinity because her female body must fail in its attempt. By failing, she shows herself as not masculine, thereby showing the x-y intersection. The same can be said of the male boxer, although this is more difficult to accept. If we posit the infinite end of the x-axis to represent the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, and the infinite end of the y-axis to represent the ideal of hegemonic femininity, then neither ideal could ever be possible. The failure of the ideal comes, as Butler (1990) notes, because of the social temporality of gender, the incessant need to perform gender, as there is no original from which the copy of gender stems. Gender performance then is much like the boxer, there is an inevitability to failure. As the boxer wins only to fight again, so gender is performed only to be performed again. Gender as performance can only ever be fleetingly achieved and not held (Butler, 1990), neither can the boxer hold victory as each victory leads her/him closer to eventual defeat. While a boxer may hold a title such as Heavyweight Champion of the World, it is only temporary, as eventually the title must be surrendered to another boxer. The male boxer, who within the confines of

[10] Oscar de la Hoya was defeated in a controversial decision in 1999 that was said to have been made because he moved away from his opponent in the last rounds of the fight to prevent his opponent from hitting him. This performance was thought to be unmanly, and the decision was a punitive reaction to this. Mike Tyson showed vulnerability over his rape conviction by trying to use the defence that he was a victim of a sexually aggressive female.

the discourse must embody a black masculinity, must then always fail to achieve the ideal of hegemonic (white) masculinity. He fails to achieve this ideal, both because of his perceived racial masculinity, and because masculinity, as performance, can never be held but must always be performed. By failing to achieve the ideal, the male boxer shows the intersection of masculinity and femininity as well as the absolute fragility of gender. In his failure, the male boxer shows us the phantasmatic quality of gender, however the present dominant discourse around boxing prevents us from seeing this, as "[t]he rules of a discourse enable us to make certain sorts of statements and to make truth claims, but the same rules force us to remain within the system and to make only those statements that conform to these rules" (Flax, 1992 , p. 452). Femininity does not have a place in the current dominant discourse, and is therefore unable to be seen as a part of the boxer within this framework.

Conclusion

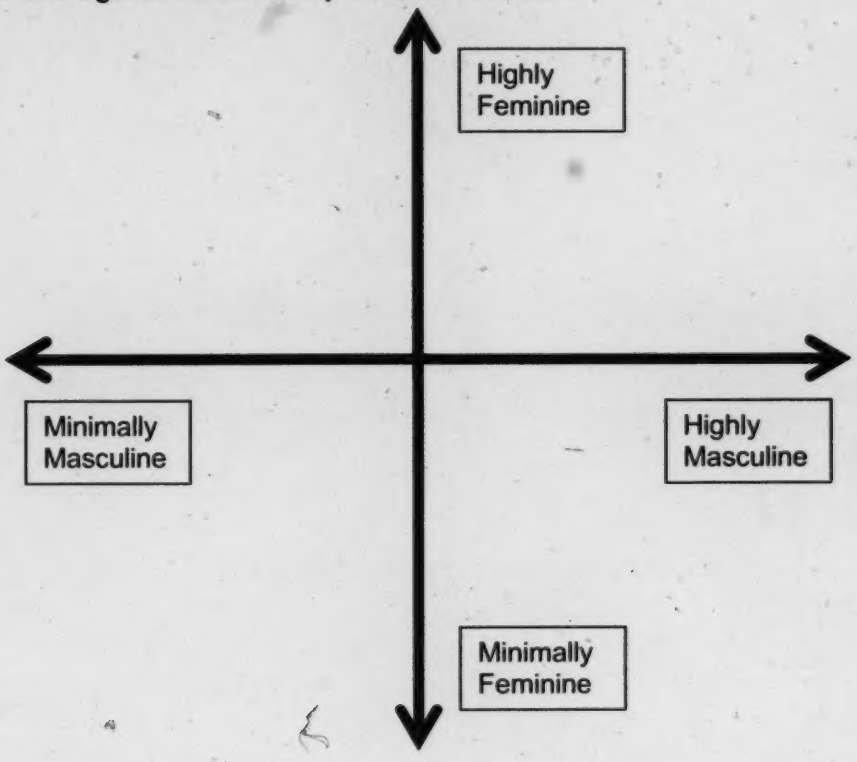
Within this paper, I have shown how the current dominant discourse about boxing is solidified within popular culture. This discourse constrains the way that boxing and boxers can be understood, and constructs a closed system that forecloses the possibility of having a different final vocabulary. The construction of the current understanding of boxing as a coherent theory that ostensibly encapsulates the complexities of the sport, and its participants, has been shown to be suspect. This creates the possibility for a new final vocabulary to be constructed that will allow for a new way of listening to those who are currently unintelligible within the present discourse.

I offer the theories of Butler (1990), Halberstam (1998), and Sedgwick (1995) as other ways of viewing gender in boxing. They are potentially alternative ways with which to engage in a dialogue, not coherent meta-narratives that can replace the current one. While this paper has focused on gender, I recognize that the rest of the current discourse is also limiting (including but not limited to notions of race, class, age, education, etc.). It is my belief that further dialogues need to be entered into in order to properly address these issues. I believe that gender is integral to our understanding of sport, and that this discussion of its impact on boxing will foster new ideas and conversations. More research will be needed to allow new ways of listening within a changing final vocabulary. It is my hope that opening this dialogue on boxing's dominant discourse will allow for more discussion which will then permit all those who are incoherent within this discourse to become understandable, not by encapsulating them into an oppressive subject position, but by disrupting and subverting the current understanding.

In critiquing the hegemonic boxing discourse, I am proposing that the female boxer be listened to without silencing her gender, or requiring the invocation of her father. This might then allow for Ann Wolfe and Marsha Valley to get the recognition that other elite professional athletes enjoy. By recognising that the dominant representation of the boxer is a discursive production, alternate ways of representing the boxer become possible. This may provide for a richer, more complicated understanding of the sport and its athletes, and in so doing, prevent the need for the female boxer to participate in her own incoherence. By showing this discourse to be problematic, the female boxer may then be given the chance that Spivak (1990) called for, to be listened to seriously, instead of being understood as Oates' (1987) parodic monster.

Figure 2-1

The Orthogonal Relationship Between Gender.



References

Abdel-Shehid, G. (2003). Muhammad Ali: America's B-side. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 26*(3), 319-327.

Andrews, D. (Ed.) (2001a). *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Andrews, D. (2001b). The fact(s) of Michael Jordan's blackness: Excavating a floating racial signifier. In D. Andrews (Ed.), *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America* (pp. 107 - 152). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Arthur, B. (2002, December 31). Best of the lip: Series: The year in sport: Moments of 2002. *National Post* (p. S4). Don Mills, Canada.

Arthur, B. (2002, November 15). NBA weekly. *National Post* (p. S5). Don Mills, Canada.

Berger, M., Wallis, B., & Watson, S. (1995). Introduction. In M. Berger, B. Wallis, & S. Watson (Eds.), *Constructing Masculinity* (pp.1-7). New York: Routledge.

Bern, S. (1993). *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble.* New York: Routledge.

Cahn, S. K. (1994). *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Chandler, D. (1996). Introduction: The pictures of boxing. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 13 - 25). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Courttv.com. (2002). Tonya Harding: Ice follies. *The System.* Accessed 5 December 2003 online at: http://www.courttv.com/onair/shows/thesystem/g_p_episodes/ice_follies

Craib, I. (1987). Masculinity and male dominance. *Sociological Review, 35*(4), 721-743.

Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (D. B. Allison, Trans.). Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1967)

Dykk, L. (1994, January 22). Tonya becomes the figure of skating's bad karma. *The Vancouver Sun* (p. F1). Vancouver, Canada.

Flax, J. (1992). The end of innocence. In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (pp. 445 - 463). New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976).

Green, S., Griffin, M., & Renzi, M. (Producers), & Kusama, K. (Director). (2000). *Girlfight* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Sony Pictures

Griffin, P. (1998). *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and homophobia in Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Harding, S. (1986). *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Hargreaves, J. (1996). Bruising Peg to boxerobics: Gendered boxing – Images and meanings. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 121 - 132). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Klasovec, S. (1995). The sexual politics of women in sport: A survey on "lesbophobia". *Canadian Women Studies, 15*(4), 63-66.

Kram, M. (2001). *Ghosts of Manila: The Fateful Blood Feud Between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Lenskyj, H. (1986). *Out Of Bounds: Women, Sport & Sexuality*. Toronto: The Women's Press.

Madani, A. (2003, July 24). The other side of Kobe Bryant. *Record* (p. 13). Sherbrooke, Canada.

Martin, B. (1996). *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian*. New York: Routledge.

McDonald, M. (2001). Safe sex symbol?: Michael Jordan and the politics of representation. In D. Andrews (Ed.), *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America* (pp. 153 - 174). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Mennesson, C. (2000). Hard women and soft women: The social construction of identities among female boxers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 35*(1), 21-33.

Miller, T. (2001). *Sport Sex*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

O'Connor, I. (2003). Basketball helps Bryant cope. *USA Today*. Accessed 5 December 2003 online at: http://usatoday.com/sports/columnist/oconnor/2003-11-19-oconnor_x.htm

Oates, J. C. (2003). *Celestial Timepiece: A Joyce Carol Oates Home Page*. Accessed 5 December 2003 online at: http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/southerr/ontyson.html

Oates, J. C. (1987). *On Boxing*. New York: Zebra Books.

Palzkill, B. (1990). Between gym shoes and high heels: The development of a lesbian identity and existence in top class sport. *International Review of the Sociology of Sport, 25*(3), 223-231.

Piper, K. (1996). Four corners, a contest of opposites. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 70 - 79). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Plimpton, G. (1977). *Shadow Box*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Pronger, B. (1990). *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenberg, .T, Lucchesi, G., & Steindorff, S. (Producers), & Benton, R. (Director). (2002). *The Human Stain* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Miramax Film Corp

Saeed, A. (2002). What's in a name? Muhammad Ali and the politics of cultural identity. *Culture, Sport, Society, 5*(3), 51-72.

Sammons, J. (1988). *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Schulberg, B. (1947). *The Harder They Fall*. New York: Random House.

Sedgwick, E. (1995). "Gosh, Boy George, you must be awfully secure in your masculinity!". In Berger, M., Wallis, B., & Watson, S. (Eds.) *Constructing Masculinity*. (pp. 11 - 20) New York: Routledge.

Sim, S. (1999). *Postmodern Encounters: Derrida and the End of History*. Cambridge, UK: Icon Books UK.

Sloop, J. M. (1997). Mike Tyson and the perils of discursive constraints. In Baker, A., & Boyd, T. (Eds.) *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media, and the Politics of Identity*. (pp. 102 - 122) Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Sonenberg, D., Gast, L., & Hackford, T. (Producers), & Gast, L. (Director). (1996). *When We Were Kings* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Gramercy Pictures

Spivak, G. (1997). Translator's preface. In J. Derrida's (1967) *Of Grammatology: Corrected Edition*. G. C. Spivak (Trans.) (pp. ix – lxxxvii) Baltimore, MD: The John's Hopkins University Press.

Spivak, G. (1990). Questions of multiculturalism. In S. Harasayam (Ed.) *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. (pp. 59 - 60) New York: Routledge.

Standard – Freeholder. (2004, September 16). Few give De La Hoya a chance to beat Bernard. *Standard – Freeholder*. Retrieved September 23, 2004, from Canadian Newsstand database.

Sugden, D. (1998). *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Todd, J. (1994, December 31). Why look back? Here's what'll happen in '95. *The Gazette* (p. E1). Montreal, Canada.

Ullrich, L. (1999, March 30). Lakers' greatest steal: Getting Bryant from Hornets may be NBA's most lopsided deal. *The Province* (p. A46). Vancouver, Canada.

Wacquant, L. (1995). Pugs at work: Bodily capital and bodily labour among professional boxers. *Body and Society, 1*(1), 65-94.

Wban, (2004a). Laila Ali biography. Accessed 22 September 2004 online at: http://www.wban.org/bio/lali.htm

Wban, (2004b). Rankings. Accessed 22 September 2004 online at: http://www.wban.org/rankings/rankpage.htm

Whitson, D. (1990). Sport in the social construction of masculinity. In Messner, M. & Sabo, D. (Eds.) *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. (pp. 19 - 29) Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Wigge, L. (2000, March 6). Stick it to players who swing their sticks. *The Sporting News*. Accessed 5 December 2003 online at: http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m1208/10_224/60081446/p1/article.jhtml

Wittig, M. (1993). One is not born a woman. In Abelove, Barale, & Halperin (Eds.) *The Lesbian & Gay Studies Reader*. (pp. 103 - 109) New York: Routledge.

Chapter 3

Boxer Eh? (Not) a Canadian Tradition

Beginnings

In light of Said's (1993) observation that, "nations themselves *are* narrations" (p. xiii), what does it mean to be Canadian? According to Said (1993) narrations "become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (p. xii), and Canadian identity is no exception. The stories told about Canada as a young nation are the stories that have impacted not only on what Canadians have come to embrace as who we[1] are, but also on who belongs and who does not. What is this national imaginary? How do we, as Canadians, define and understand ourselves?

Boxing is also made up of stories and narrations. Who counts as 'the boxer' and who does not is a function of discourse. How 'the boxer' is defined and understood is an effect of the stories told about boxers. What can the stories told about Canadian boxers tell us about boxers and about Canada? How is the national imaginary painted within the sporting discourse particular to boxing in Canada?

This paper explores these questions, but also the impact that these questions have on some of those people who are seen as not belonging to the Canadian imaginary. By exploring the intersections of what may be competing narratives, dominant discourses become more evident, and the implications of these discourses can then be exposed. One implication of master narratives is that some people will be excluded. A second implication is that the exclusion of people from the master narrative sometimes depends

[1] Throughout this chapter, I use 'we' to denote all Canadians collectively, which is to mean anyone who thinks of herself as Canadian, as opposed to those who fit the ideal narrative of Canadian.

on the complicity of those who are not excluded. Sport is not an innocent pastime, and the implications of sporting discourse are not innocent either; there is no innocence.

The exposition of exclusive narratives in sport comes with the price of the loss of innocence. This price also needs to be paid by those who accept the master narratives of 'Canadianness'. Canada is a country that likes to think of itself as kinder, gentler, and more ethical than anywhere else in the world. It is well past the time to explode that myth, and pay the price of the exclusionary behaviour in which Canadians have been complicit.

What does it mean to be Canadian?

In his book *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* Francis (1997) tells us:

> With repetition [the core myths] come to form the mainstream memory of our culture, our national dreams, the master narrative which explains the culture to itself and seems to express its overriding purpose. This is the story of Canada, we say, the story which contains our ideals, which gives our experience continuity and purpose. This is who we are. (p. 10)

The ideal Canadian must then embody these mythical characteristics, or he will be seen to have failed to be a 'real Canadian'[2]. As Brodie (2003) states: "[t]hese descriptions set out who belongs to a nation and who does not, establish a hierarchy of the most to least desirable members of the nation state, and help to discipline citizens to aspire to

[2] I use the pronoun "he" in referring to the Canadian following Bannerji's (2000) discussion of the Canadian as having to be male. While women can be citizens, they can only be second-class ones, as "citizenship does not provide automatic membership in the nation's community" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 66).

appropriate behaviours and characteristics" (p. 20). But can everyone aspire to be a 'real Canadian'? According to Bannerji (2000) no, only men can fully belong to the community, and only those men who are seen as white. Handa (2003) concurs arguing the "discourse of nationalism equates *Canadian* with whiteness" (p. 5). This is a recurring theme in the work of many Canadian writers (Bissoondath, 2002; Francis, 1997; Khan, 2002; Mackey, 1999; Walcott, 1999)[3].

How can this racist, sexist version of Canada fit within the popular understanding of Canada as multicultural, enlightened, and accepting of diversity and difference? If Brodie's (2003) hierarchy is an accurate assessment, then Canada is not tolerant and accepting, making this notion of tolerance another myth on which our national identity is based. Wagman (2002) asks the question: "How do companies like Tim Horton's (a chain of donut shops across Canada) and Molson and products like beer, donuts, toques, and fleece, for example, become representative as essential elements of 'Canadian culture'" (p. 78)? According to Francis (1997), "many of our cherished myths were invented by government agencies or private corporations for quite specific, usually self-serving, purposes" (p. 9).

What is Canadian identity then? It appears that it is a narration, a story that has been told, and continues to be told, and we, as Canadians, have mostly accepted that this story tells us 'who we are.' If this is the case, then Keohane (1997) makes an excellent point in stating:

> It is an unavoidable condition of the discourse about identity in Canada that we implicitly invoke an allusive/ elusive unified ideal 'Canada' that is common to us, for as soon as we articulate 'how things appear to me'

[3] This list is not an exhaustive one, but examples of some of the work in this area.

> (whether that be an affirmative appraisal of prevailing hegemonies from a position of privilege, or a scathing critique from a standpoint of marginalization or exclusion), conflicting versions of 'Canada' are articulated, which necessarily and unavoidably posit an ideal Canada which our view of the prevailing reality either manifests approximately or fails to measure up to. (pp. 8-9)

This suggests then that even when we attempt to speak back to the dominant colonial idea of what it is to be Canadian, we are already implicated in the naturalization of the ideal. As Keohane (1997) states, "the assertion of any particularity (Maritimer, gay, Korean) always already implicitly presupposes a unified ideal 'Canada' (which simultaneously excludes and thus constitutes, and incorporates and thus decomposes, the particular identity) with reference to which the differentiation can be made" (p. 8).

If we accept the argument that there must be a unified ideal Canadian that is made up of the myths of Anglo-Canadian history, we must then look at what characteristics are encompassed within this ideal. The most obvious one would be Englishness, which is characterized not only by the language spoken, but also by white skin. Francis (1997) also specifies the myths of the Mountie and the peacekeeper as important keys to understanding the Canadian ideal. Keohane (1997) suggests, "the ideal type member of Canadian society is the tolerant unpretentious person, who calmly pursues his or her business without any fanfare, and is respectful of others who do likewise" (p. 39)[4]. Seiler (2002) speaks of "a distinctly English-Canadian nationalism; that is, Canadians have a long-standing tendency to define themselves as non-Americans and a long-

[4] Keohane suggests this ideal as an ironic representation of the ideal Canadian, and not as an actual ideal that someone could achieve. I present it here to show the attributes that are understood, within discourse, to be the ideal characteristics of the Canadian.

standing sense of grievance vis-à-vis Americans due to the tendency of the latter to ignore them" (p. 8).

Within this representation of the ideal Canadian, Seiler (2002) and many others point to the peacekeeping myth as an important construction of Canadian nationalism. "Canadians were glad to be seen as middlemen, honest brokers, helpful fixers in a world where these qualities were hard to come by. In this way, peacekeeping seemed to make Canadians different – and somehow better" (Seiler, 2002, pp. 6-7). Different and better than Americans, who could be the warmongers that Francis (1997) sees Canadians opposing by being peacekeepers.

Honesty and helpfulness are also tied up in the myth of the Mountie. Once again, the spectre of the bad American rears its head in the formation of this myth. The benevolent collaborative Mountie is often contrasted with the 'Indian'-killing American cowboy (Francis, 1997; Mackey, 1999). This works not only to place the Canadian in opposition to (and morally above) the American, but also fosters the image of the Canadian as honest, kind, benevolent, and tolerant. The American is required in order for the difference (and superiority) of the Canadian to be revealed. Without the contrast of the 'ugly American', the 'benevolent Canadian' cannot exist. While the American is absent from the representation of the Canadian, the presence of the American is required for the representation to occur. Following Derrida (1967/1997), absence is not the opposite of presence, but is always already implicated in the presence. As Spivak (1997) explains: "Such is the strange "being" of the sign: half of it always "not there" and the other half always "not that." The structure of the sign is determined by the trace … of that other which is forever absent" (p. xvii). The Mountie requires the absent presence of the

warmonger American. Without the contrast, the Mountie cannot assert his morality, benevolence, and tolerance.

The Mountie, according to Francis (1997) "has come to represent a boy scoutish quality which according to the master narrative is as basic to our national personality as flag-waving is to the Americans or the stiff upper lip is to the British" (p. 35). So not only is this character (the boy scout/ Mountie) honest, brave, tolerant, modest, polite, and law-abiding, but all Canadians, if they are in fact 'real Canadians', must be these things. Because the American is the absent presence to the Canadian, to be other than the Mountie, is to bring the presence of the American to light, thus calling into question one's own Canadianness.

The classlessness of Canada is another myth that hounds many Canadians[5]. Proponents of neo-liberalism have represented Canada's social safety nets as the "end of divisive ideological battles and the democratic resolution of class struggle" (Brodie & Trimble, 2003, p. 3). This works alongside the Protestant work ethic to argue that all Canadians are able, if they are willing to work hard, to achieve anything. As Bissoondath (2002) paraphrases Sheila Finestone (then Minister of State for Multiculturalism) "all Canadians [have] the freedom to choose what they wanted to be and what they wanted to do" (pp. xi-xii). Thus making anyone's failure to achieve a goal, entirely their own failure and not in any way due to social structures or constraints.

Tolerance runs through many of the different myths. Another myth it is enmeshed in is that of the 'mosaic'. Bannerji (2000) argues that the national identity is necessarily painted as white, making tolerance necessary, because, "The other outside of this moral

[5] I use the word 'hounds' to represent the troublesome nature of this myth to those Canadians who are not middle-class.

and cultural whiteness are targets for either assimilation or tolerance" (p. 42). If they can be made to accept whiteness as a floating signifier, than they can for the moment be understood as Canadian. For example, colour can be put under erasure, making someone able to be read as white when their skin colour does not appear to reflect this. Derrida's term "*sous rature*" or "under erasure" means "to write the word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible)" (Spivak, 1997, p. xiv). Colour is put under erasure when another competing discourse becomes more prominent in the way an individual is understood. As Spivak (1997) notes:

> The sign cannot be taken as a homogeneous unit bridging an origin (referent) and an end (meaning), as "semiology," the study of signs, would have it. The sign must be studied "under erasure," always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such. (p. xxxix)

A black corporate lawyer may have his[6] color put under erasure by the hegemonic notions that white men are more rational and intelligent than black men. The lawyer would then be seen as ~~black~~, thus he presents with a floating racial signifier. It is floating, because the erasure can never be complete, but must always be occurring. When the floating signifier fails, and his whiteness is revoked, so too is his Canadianness. This (re)vocation of whiteness can occur to apparently 'white' and 'non-white' people.

Francis (1997) also harshly critiques the mosaic for its failure to recognize the inequalities of Canadian society. He argues that the Canadian mainstream expresses a

---

[6] I am using a male example as the female lawyer would be further complicated by the putting under erasure of her gender that would occur for similar reasons.

benign view of racial relations, ignoring the realities of injustice and inequality in order to celebrate a surface of diversity and mutual understanding. The implication alluded to in Francis's critique is explicitly encapsulated by Mackey's (1999) observation: "The assumption is that visibility and self-representation in themselves answer the problems of power and history" (p. 87). Mackey (1999) also offers a stand on tolerance: "It is through the presence of others, through highlighting the *reconciliation of difference*, that historical and present-day violence is erased and Canadian national character is produced as innocent and 'tolerant'" (p. 88, emphasis in original). Walcott (1999) echoes these ideas writing, "the recurring myth of Canada [is] as a benevolent, caring and tolerant country that adapts to 'strangers' so that strangers do not have to adapt to it" (p. 32).

Francis (1997) nicely sums up the overall picture of the collective "we" in Canadian identity:

> We Canadians have become used to thinking of ourselves as modest, self-effacing types, quick to beg pardon for imagined rudeness, reticent about putting ourselves forward in any way. We are so polite and unassertive, we believe, that not much happens here. (p. 83)

It is with these notions of 'who we are' as Canadians in mind that I turn to a discussion of how this precludes certain people from being accepted as 'real Canadians', as the "unmarked Canadian"[7]. I would like to preface this however, with a word of caution. In the words of Keohane (1997): "because the original identity is a contingent historical construction, a precarious constellation of (what are ultimately arbitrary) elements. In

[7] I am borrowing Mackey's (1999) term "unmarked Canadian" to denote the ideal or 'real' Canadian as being the implicit default to which all Other, or hyphenated Canadians must be compared.

other words, the identity has no essence that gives it transcendent being outside of a particular socially constructed historical context" (p. 23).

How do the myths remain current?

Molson beer commercials reiterate the myths of the 'real Canadian'. Molson's goal with the advertising campaigns for Molson Canadian beer is to "reinforce Molson Canadian as the brand that stands for Canadian pride", "the Canadian beer for the proudly Canadian guy" (Jones, 2003, p. 38). In fact some take this so far that Seiler (2002) suggests that "drinking Molson Canadian is a patriotic act, one that draws on and reinforces Canadians' resistance to being consumed – eaten and drunk up – by the American colossus and offers a vehicle for 'drinking in' Canadian identity" (p. 52).

Molson takes steps to align its product with institutions and characteristics that many Canadians hold as representative of themselves. Molson's affiliation with hockey leads "many Canadians [to] regard the start of the NHL playoffs as the start of the beer-drinking season" (Seiler, 2002, p. 47). Molson's slogan "I am Canadian" lends their commercials an authenticity in defining what it means to be Canadian. By naming their beer "Canadian", Molson's produces themselves as the experts on all things Canadian – not just beer. Their authority is then not questioned when they put forward views on what it means to be Canadian.

Commercials, such as 'The Rant' offer up Molson's image of who the 'real Canadian' is.

> First, the advertisement [The Rant] highlights and then refutes a number of characteristics (occupations, dwellings, accents, food) stereotypically

> associated with American perceptions of Canadian life. However, an additional layer to the advertisement is added, as Joe's response to these characterizations also contains assertions on the superiority of Canadian public institutions and policy initiatives (bilingualism, diplomacy, and multiculturalism) that represent stereotypically *Canadian* perceptions of Canadian life" (Wagman, 2002, p. 85).

This commercial portrays Canadians as underdogs who must always work hard to be understood by the less intelligent Americans. It also reiterates and congeals the notion of Canadians as morally superior and of Molson's as the authority on this subject; the expert who can speak for the underdog Canadian. Setting up a Canadian versus the Americans is a common theme in Molson's commercials.

Molson's 'The Water Cooler' commercial[8] recalls the myth of the Mountie. In this commercial, the Canadian (a twenty-something white man) is working in an office in the United States. He meets one of his American co-workers at the water cooler where the American proceeds to verbally abuse him by saying stereotypically Canadian sayings (such as "how's it going, eh?"), and taunting him about his accent and generally bashing Canada and Canadian identity. The Canadian takes the abuse of his American co-worker, because he (as a 'real Canadian') is peaceful and nice, but when the American pushes too far, the Canadian is duty-bound to react. He pulls the American's suit jacket over his head, as a hockey player would do with an opponent's jersey in a fight, and proceeds to repeatedly punch the American with one hand while holding onto him with the other in another move reminiscent of hockey fights. He must defend his nation, his identity, from

[8] I was unable to find any reference to the name of this particular commercial. I am calling it 'The Water Cooler' as that is the name that seems likely in relation to the names of Molson's others commercials.

the uncouth obnoxious unprovoked attack of the belligerent American. His defence, although aggressive and violent, is ethical, not only because he is defending his nation, but also because he waited until no other option was open to him.

This commercial draws on the construction of masculinity that is seen in the Canadian hockey player. The player will play physically, and punish his opponent, but he must always do it in a fashion that is ethical. He must only physically abuse his opponent when it is called for. The Canadian cannot be seen to be performing an act that would be considered a 'cheap shot'; he must only be seen to be defending those things that should be dear to him, his team (which stands in for the Mountie's nation), or his honour.

Can the boxer be Canadian?

Within North American popular culture (and arguably boxing culture), boxing is discussed from a narrow stereotypical viewpoint. The meaning of boxing is solidified within a masculinist framework that suggests that boxing and maleness are irrevocably linked. Intersecting with this framework are blackness, youth, poverty, and a lack of education and intelligence that are also conceptualized as constituting 'the boxer'. 'The boxer' is also seen to embody specific 'personality traits' that allow him to participate in a sport that is often spoken of as violent and unethical.

If we accept this as the representation of 'the boxer' to Canadians, how can 'the boxer' be Canadian? The identity boxer is at odds with the identity Canadian in such a way as to make him impossible within the same body. As Flax (1992) says, "The rules of a discourse enable us to make certain sorts of statements and to make truth claims, but the same rules force us to remain within the system and to make only those statements that conform to these rules" (p. 452). In this case, 'the boxer', does not conform to the

discourse that defines Canadian identity, rendering him unintelligible. 'The boxer' cannot be Canadian because 'the boxer' is black; 'the boxer' cannot be Canadian because 'the boxer' is unintelligent, uneducated, and poor; 'the boxer' cannot be Canadian because 'the boxer' is violent and unethical. 'The boxer' is the presence of the American, and therefore the anti-thesis of the Canadian. According to Abdel-Shehid (1999), boxing belongs in a third level of Canadian sports that are considered "black" and "have largely been narrated as *un*-Canadian sports" (p. 130). How then can we make sense of the Canadian boxer?

Can the Canadian boxer be a reverse discourse? If, following Foucault (1969/2004), discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49), then how is the 'Canadian boxer' formed? As previously argued in this paper, Canadianness is mainly defined by non-Americanness. If the American is the invisible referent in the boxer, the Canadian boxer must be the opposite of that discursive production. With the absent presence of the more proper American boxer, the Canadian boxer becomes understandable as the reverse, the present absence. What is present is the Canadian; the American is absent, therefore creating a boxer who must be white, quiet, unassuming, polite, patient, and a loser.

The idea of the Canadian boxer as the reverse of the American boxer seems to work with Seiler's (2002) notion that "one of the organizing principles of English Canadian nationalism has always been anti-Americanism" (p. 50). The ideal Canadian as represented by the myth of the Mountie (Francis, 1997), the peacekeeping narrative (Francis, 1997; Roche, 2003; Seiler, 2002), and the notion of the "*Canadian*-Canadian" (Mackey, 1999) seem to offer a way to understand the Canadian boxer. "Official

narratives of nationhood, despite the way they include and highlight cultural difference, also reproduce and bolster particular forms of white settler national identity" (Mackey, 1999, p. 87). This ideal Canadian harkens back to the master narrative of a simpler time when 'all' Canadians were White English Protestants, pioneers who stand "as a symbol of how Canadians like to see themselves: honest, brave, modest, law-abiding, polite" (Francis, 1997, p. 50). So, while Khan (2002) writes about Canadian multicultural policy[9] as it relates to ethnic minorities, there is a way this policy also functions for the dominant identity. "Multicultural policy and practices frequently support discursive articulations of community as static" (Khan, 2002, p. 124); I would argue that this includes the dominant community as well.

The reverse discourse of the Canadian boxer is produced as the master narrative come to life in the present day. He is white, hard working, modest, polite, brave, and above all honest. This allows the Canadian boxer to be conflated with the myth of the Mountie, and as long as his behaviour is seen to be honourable, then his behaviour is seen as ethical. It is not that the behaviour must *be* honourable and ethical, but that it *appears* honourable and ethical. This appearance requires a witnessing of the behaviour, and an understanding of the behaviour within the hegemonic nationalist discourse. Willie deWit and Scotty Olson are examples of this Canadian boxer[10], while Shawn O'Sullivan is an example of the fallen Canadian boxer. All three of these boxers are white. They were always portrayed as the underdog, and as sluggers, these are guys who will give you an

---

[9] Canada's Multiculturalism Act was the policy put in place in 1988 (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). This act continued to be in force during the timeframe in which the four boxers discussed were being written about in the popular press. As this chapter critiques the actual policy, the term 'multiculturalism' is being used. The ideal of multiculturalism versus diversity is not a part of the argument put forward in this chapter.

[10] These two are only two of many boxers that have fit into this idea of 'the Canadian boxer'. Further examples include, but are not limited to, Tommy Burns, George Chuvalo, and Donny Lalonde.

honest-days-work for an honest-days-pay; they are genuinely nice guys. They are also soft-spoken, much like the Canadian hockey player – they only get aggressive if they must (if someone makes derogatory remarks about Canada) and are otherwise self-deprecating, nice, quiet, boys-next-door, certainly not the unethical violent boxer (who is of course American).

Within North American boxing narratives the legendary "Great White Hope" looms large, but it has a particularly strong streak in Canada. All of the "Canadian boxers" have carried this title for portions of their career. Part of the Canadianness of these boxers might have to do with the implicit a priori failure that is always already present in the Great White Hope. The desperation that is implied by the "hope" produces a subject who must always be at a disadvantage. That many Canadian boxers have been given this title, suggests that Canadian's feel not only inferior to Americans, but also inferior to blacks. As Walcott (1999) succinctly states "blackness represents what Canada is not" (p. 32), making blacks unintelligible as Canadians. While this is rooted in an understanding of boxing as an atavistic sport that the more 'bestial black male' ought to excel at, it is also symptomatic of the pervasiveness of white privilege and fear. Canada must then require its boxers to be white, and to resist the floating racial signifier that might allow them to be read as black. This resistance to accept black bodies as Canadian bodies is closely tied to the inability to come to terms with a slave holding past, thus allowing Canada to continually produce a fiction of whiteness (Walcott, 1999).

This is dramatically contrasted by the appearance of a boxer such as George Foreman, who while quiet and unassuming in ways that might be understood as Canadian (or at least non-American), had his gentleness read as something else entirely – a lack of

intelligence. This is not to suggest that George Foreman is Canadian – he is not, he is American. This illustrates that being quiet, soft-spoken and unassuming is not the definitive quality the boxer must embody to be thought of as Canadian. It could be argued that his quiet, unassuming, soft-spoken nature made Foreman seen (within North America) as amazingly stupid (because it is out of character for a 'real American' to be quiet), and therefore the ideal candidate to be the boxer. Foreman's blackness complicates the way that his intelligence is read, as the ability to participate in rational-critical debate has been narrated within democratic communities as the province of the white male humanist (Moorti, 2002). It is my contention that were Foreman Canadian, he would not be intelligible as both his blackness and what is understood as his stupidity would preclude his acceptance within the national sporting iconography. The understanding of Foreman as stupid plays into the national narration of Canadians as more intelligent (and educated) than Americans (Francis, 1997).

Lennox Lewis, who can arguably be considered Canadian as he won a gold medal for Canada in the 1988 Olympics, is also quiet and unassuming, but in contrast to Foreman, he is understood as intelligent. Lewis was one of the most successful boxers in the world, but left Canada for England because he could not garner the media coverage of other (white) Canadian boxers[11]. The Canadian media by 1991 had overlooked Lewis so often that Canadian sportswriter John Short (1991) suggested that what Canadian boxers had in common was their inability to fight, even though Lewis had held the European

[11] An interesting aside to Lewis's inability to garner media attention in Canada, was his difficulty getting it in England as well. In a feature story immediately after Lewis's retirement, sportswriter Paul Hayward (2004) wrote, "if the British public decline to spend more than a few moments reflecting on Lewis's fine career, it might be because they never really felt they knew him. An appropriate nickname might have been Lennox (Three Flags) Lewis, because he was a Cockney who emigrated to Canada as a child but felt closest to Jamaican culture" (p. B10). Is it any wonder that a world-renowned athlete who is treated as if he does not belong in the country he calls home would search for another country that would not exclude him?

Heavyweight Title for over a year. While some might argue that Lewis was not Canadian at this time (as he held a European title), another writer from *The Edmonton Journal* (Short's paper), Robin Brownlee (1992) later discussed the pending Bruno-Lewis fight as the British fighter (Bruno) against the Canadian (Lewis). In fact, in 1993 when Lewis was IBF[12] heavyweight champ, deWit (who was retired from boxing) was remembered as "the hottest box-office commodity in the game" (p. C2) by John Short (1993), an obvious slight against Lewis who held the European, the British Commonwealth and the WBC[13] heavyweight titles at the time. Only two things distinguish Lewis from the boxers who were lauded as Canadian heroes; first, he won his fights, as opposed to the others who seemed most notable in their losses; and second, he is black.

Who can(not) be the Canadian boxer?

The Canadian boxer must be seen to be acting, as the Mountie, in an ethical way. He must be seen to be defending the honour of his nation, as in the Olympics, or his team. What can constitute the professional boxer's team? In the case of Willie deWit, his team could arguably be seen as anyone from Grande Prairie, or possibly anyone from a small town in Canada. This allowed him to be fighting for the acceptance of the small town Canadian boy as worthy of consideration. This could allow his actions to be seen as ethical in a similar way as David's actions versus Goliath. As the underdog the boxer must fight back, or he will be beaten (both on the scorecards and physically). If deWit wins he achieves a victory for all small town Canadian boys.

---

[12] The IBF (International Boxing Federation) title is one of many boxing titles in the world.
[13] The WBC (World Boxing Council) title is arguably the most prestigious title outside of the "undisputed world heavyweight champion" title, which Lewis went on to win in November 1999.

In a similar way, Olson can be seen as an underdog because of his size, as well as the injury difficulty that haunted his career. This led to his being called "Canada's miniature Rocky" by sportswriter Graham Houston (1997), but Houston feared that Olson "[would] not be enjoying a movie-script finish" (p. B9). This not only sets Olson up as the perennial underdog (as Rocky was), but also as the hero (a typically Canadian hero).

Shawn O'Sullivan was viewed as a 'real Canadian' boxer for the first part of his career, but that seemed to change when he decided to come back out of retirement. O'Sullivan's repeated comeback attempts were seen as an example of his being stupid (possibly even stupider than George Foreman). The official end of his career (which came about when a neurosurgeon refused to approve his license) was termed "a merciful closure to a sad chapter" when O'Sullivan "the kid who had long ago lost his skills, and now his sensibilities, had to be legislated into a safety zone" (Connolly, 1997, p. 72). Could this apparent stupidity have made him seen as un-Canadian?

Each time O'Sullivan tried to restart his professional career, his reputation was questioned. Allusions to his being a spoiled brat detracted from his being celebrated in the same way as deWit. The images depicting O'Sullivan as family-oriented, which previously had shown him living at home with his parents (Burke, 1986), were turned into stories of his being unable to support himself or his family when he ended up with "the shame of unemployment" (Burnside, 1997, p. D1). This sort of portrayal, making demands of social programs, commonly brings accusations of selfishness, and of somehow depriving hard-working, deserving Canadian taxpayers of their hard-earned money (Brodie & Trimble, 2003). That a former professional athlete, who was known to make significant amounts of money during his career would require this kind of

assistance, is not only hard to believe for the average sports fan, it is most certainly a cause of indignation.

In addition, deWit was seen to have created his own success by using the money he had earned as a professional boxer to go to law school, while O'Sullivan was seen as having squandered any earnings he may have had, therefore he *needed* to return to boxing. The omission of any other social reasons for deWit to be able to attend law school while O'Sullivan returned to boxing plays into the individualistic rhetoric of Canadian nationalism. The choices made by deWit and O'Sullivan are seen as individual free will, not as constrained (both enabled and limited) by the social environments in which the two men lived. This further alienates O'Sullivan, as the choice to continue fighting for monetary gain produces him as un-Canadian.

The kid who "had the face of a leprechaun, the manners of a prince and the gentle demeanor of a clergyman" (Scott, 1992, p. D5) now seemed much more like the 'criminal American' boxer. Embedded within this notion of the criminal American boxer is also the understanding of the boxer as black. This complicates O'Sullivan's actions, as his seeming embodiment of this ideal (the boxer) requires him to be understood as racialized in a similar way to the black boxer[14]. References to O'Sullivan's Irish heritage, and his nickname "The Cabbagetown Kid", are used to produce a floating racial signifier. While his skin is white, his racial signifier is not. At the beginning of his professional career, O'Sullivan was signified white, and along with other Canadian boxers carried the title

[14] O'Sullivan's racialization is further complicated by the historic understanding of the Irish as "the blacks of Europe" (cited in Ignatiev, 1995). While the use of the term "black" to refer to the Irish prior to the first World War is contested, it is widely accepted that the Irish "became white" around this time period. For further discussions around the whitening of the Irish see Francis, Jones, & Smith, 2004; Guterl, 2001; Ignatiev, 1995.

"the Great White Hope". Later in his career, this racial signifier changed, signalling his removal both from whiteness and Canadianness.

O'Sullivan's *Canadianness* had to be questioned following Walcott's (1999) notion of "blackening" that signals:

> [T]hat nation-state administrators try to force what it means to be black on people through various mechanisms of domination and subordination. They are, in effect, telling you that you have very little, if any, relation to the nation. This process often involves arguing that black people are primitive, backwards, and not worthy of citizenship" (pp. 35-36).

In using this notion I am not suggesting that O'Sullivan *is* black, or even is explicitly read as black, but that he is shown to be backwards, primitive, and not worthy of citizenship, because of his circumstances and his sport. His race can then be read with a floating racial signifier that produces him as not white. In so doing, he is then placed in a position of deciding whether to accept domination and subordination, by quitting fighting and resuming his place in the unemployment line, or continue fighting, making him seen as unworthy of his Canadianness[15].

Where does this take me?

In considering whether the boxer can also be Canadian, the important question for me has become not 'what is Canadian', but rather what are the implications of this understanding of Canadian? Is the twenty-something, white, middle-class, educated, polite, honest, tolerant, nice man that appears as the ideal, unmarked, Canadian as nice

[15] I feel it is important to note that a very significant difference for O'Sullivan is that he does have the choice to quit boxing, which although bowing to subordination in some ways would remove him from the situation of being understood as racialized in this way. Lennox Lewis, boxer or not, cannot remove himself from the effect of his skin colour.

and innocent as we would like to think? If this ideal, the unmarked Canadian, produces all others as marked, hyphenated Canadians, can we really consider him nice, or innocent?

"If a nation is a group of people who share the same illusions about themselves, then Canadians need some new illusions" (Francis, 1997, p. 176). These illusions are not just a nice, innocent ideal, but as I have shown, they have material effects that function to benefit those who are closest to the ideal. The nostalgic, apparently innocent quality of the ideal covers up the nastiness, intolerance, unfairness, unpeaceful, impolite, racist, sexist, unethical, dishonest, cowardly, unearned privilege that produces this imaginary ideal.

I heartily agree with Francis (1997), it is time for new illusions, but I think we need to take it farther. Illusions and myths are insufficient. Arguably, fence sitting is no longer acceptable and action is necessary. According to Flax (1992), "Political action and change require and call upon many human capacities including empathy, anger, and disgust. There is no evidence that appeals to reason, knowledge or truth are uniquely effective or ought to occupy privileged positions in strategies for change" (p. 458). Hyphenated Canadians have voiced their anger and disgust for a long time; perhaps it is time to understand this as a new *Canadian* way of behaving. Perhaps it is time to shed the peacekeeping, polite image and understand that being Canadian means that relations of power decide what 'truth' is, and that politeness will not change that. Perhaps it is time for all Canadians to wage war on the myth that Canadian policy allows every Canadian, regardless of race, gender, class, sexuality, and any other categorizations you can think of, the advantages and privileges of being part of the community of Canada. Perhaps it is

time for those with privilege to understand how they are implicated in the subordination of those who are angry and disgusted. Perhaps it is time for all Canadians to be angry and disgusted.

References

Abdel-Shehid, G. (1999). "Who got next?" Raptor morality and black public masculinity in Canada. In L. Van Luven & P. L. Walton (Eds.), *Pop Can: Popular Culture in Canada*, (pp.128 - 139). Scarborough, Canada: Prentice Hall.

Abu-Laban, Y. & Gabriel, C. (2002). *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity, and Globalization*. Toronto, Canada: Broadview Press.

Bannerji, H. (2000). *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Bissoondath, N. (2002). *Selling Illusions*. Toronto, Canada: Penguin Books.

Brodie, J. (2003). On being Canadian. In J. Brodie & L. Trimble (Eds.), *Reinventing Canada: Politics of the 21st Century*, (pp. 18 - 30). Toronto, Canada: Prentice Hall.

Brodie, J. & Trimble, L. (2003). Reinventing Canada: An overview. In J. Brodie & L. Trimble (Eds.), *Reinventing Canada: Politics of the 21st Century*, (pp. 1 - 16). Toronto, Canada: Prentice Hall.

Brownlee, R. (1992, March 18). IBF title bout likely for the Bulldog. *The Edmonton Journal*, p. D6.

Burke, T. (1986, February 10). O'Sullivan attracts more than 'fight crowd'. *The [Montreal] Gazette*, p. D1.

Burnside, S. (1997, April 7). Boxing: O'Sullivan stages latest comeback: After standing in the unemployment line, ex-Canadian champ returns to the ring. *The Windsor Star*, p. D1.

Connolly, P. (1997, July 20). O'Sullivan's finish a pitiful caricature. *[Halifax] Daily News*. p. 72.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Of Grammatology: Corrected Edition.* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

Flax, J. (1992). The end of innocence. In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (pp. 445 - 463). New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (2004). *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.) London, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1969).

Francis, D. (1997). *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*. Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Francis, R. D., Jones, R., & Smith, D. B. (2004). *Origins: Canadian History to Confederation* (5th edition). Scarborough, Canada: Nelson.

Guterl, M. P. (2001). *The Color of Race in America 1900-1940*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Handa, A. (2003). *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.

Hayward, P. (2004, February 6). The last great heavyweight. *National Post*, pp. B8, B10.

Houston, G. (1997, March 22). Carbajal might be too much for Olson. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B9.

Ignatiev, N. (1995). *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge.

Jones, D. (2003). 'Here's to you, Canada' makes Molson Canadian the toast of the town. *Communication World, 20*(3), 38-39.

Keohane, K. (1997). *Symptoms of Canada*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Khan, S. (2002). *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.

Mackey, E. (1999). *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. New York: Routledge.

Moorti, S. (2002). *Color of Rape*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Roche, D. (2003). Canadian security for a new era: Principles and pragmatics. In J. Brodie & L. Trimble (Eds.), *Reinventing Canada: Politics of the 21st Century*, (pp. 358 - 373). Toronto, Canada: Prentice Hall.

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Scott, T. (1992, March 16). O'Sullivan hopes for redemption: Steps into ring against Hilton. *The Edmonton Journal*, p. D5.

Seiler, R. M. (2002). Selling patriotism/ selling beer: The case of the "I Am Canadian" commercial. *American Review of Canadian Studies, 32*, 45-67.

Short, J. (1993, August 13). DeWit brings class to amateur boxing. *The Edmonton Journal*, p. C2.

Short, J. (1991, October, 25). Boxer just can't fight. *The Edmonton Journal*, p. F2.

Spivak, G. (1997). Translator's preface. In J. Derrida's (1967) *Of Grammatology: Corrected Edition*. G. C. Spivak (Trans.) (pp. ix – lxxxvii) Baltimore, MD: The John's Hopkins University Press.

Wagman, I. (2002). Wheat, barley, hops, citizenship: Molson's "I Am [Canadian]" campaign and the defense of Canadian national identity through advertising. *The Velvet Light Trap, 50*, 77-89.

Walcott, R. (1999). "Keep on movin": Rap, black Atlantic identities and the problem of nation. In L. Van Luven & P. L. Walton (Eds.), *Pop Can: Popular Culture in Canada*, (pp. 27 - 41). Scarborough, Canada: Prentice Hall.

Chapter 4

Queering Boxing: Boxing Queer

Paradoxical Separability

It seems to me that there is a methodological paradox in a particular poststructural reading practice. A contemporary way of theorising identity in critical readings of sport is to understand what might be called in modernist language "identity categories" or aspects as co-constitutive of each other (for example, sexuality is never ungendered, unclassed, or unraced) (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). In order to articulate the relationship of these aspects, they must be separated into individual, and therefore discrete, dimensions. But if they are "truly" co-constitutive, there cannot be discrete dimensions to speak of, thus presenting a paradox. We allude to the inherently inseparable with the language of separability.

It might help to imagine an analogy that entails separability to articulate identity. Since each person can be identified by race, class, age, gender, sexuality, intellect, nationality, and other categories that are not easily discernible, it might be argued that identity is like a plate of spaghetti, which has so many noodles that each individual noodle cannot be seen. While the plate of noodles appears to be a tangled mess, it is still possible, however, to distinguish a given noodle from the rest. The problem with the noodle model for understanding human identity, then, is that it entails separability.

To use another analogy, identity is more like chocolate sauce strings. You cannot pull the chocolate sauce apart. You can never actually follow one string through to the end, because each string is actually not singular, but are in fact each other. There is no

end to follow the string to, because as you follow one seemingly out from the mess, you inevitably end up back in the melted chocolate mess in the middle, not because they are circular, but because they are inseparable. In a very complex sauce, the 'strings' would not be merely chocolate sauce, but there would also be 'strings' made from caramel sauce, raspberry sauce, hot fudge, and so on. Not only would it be impossible to separate each 'string' from the others, the taste of each would no longer be individual chocolate or caramel, but a coming together of these flavours that in fact constitutes a new flavour of its own. In attempting to separate the flavours, the complexity of the newly constituted flavour would be lost. Similarly, the complexity of the person is lost when they are read with the language of separability.

When we look at a person, what we see is the melted chocolate/ caramel/ raspberry/ hot fudge sauce mess in the middle, although at times we may choose to acknowledge only the chocolate, or the raspberry, or the caramel. As academics, we try to pull parts of the sauce out and speak of only those particular strings we think are important. In order to articulate inseparability, we foreground it through separability. Yet if identity is inherently co-constitutive, *it* cannot be separated from *itself*. We cannot speak of discrete pieces working together, as this already implies separability, we must speak of identity as a unified singular thing (but not in the modernist way). This puts me in mind of a hybrid plant, it is not solely one plant or the other, yet it is not both plants discretely. It is a unified combination of the two plants, which cannot be separated into either individual plant. The problem then becomes how do we talk about the inherently inseparable when we only have a language of separability?

In this paper, I argue for just such an understanding of 'the boxer'. While by virtue of language I must necessarily speak of these 'categories' as separable, it is the complexity of their intersections that interests me. The required normativity that pervades our lives does not lend itself to the complexity of an individual, and totalizing subject positions, like 'the boxer', require an examination of this complexity. The separability of language allows for a silencing of this complexity so that homogeneity may be written in the silence.

Within popular culture 'the boxer' is understood to be synonymous with a specific homogenous ideal: young, black, unintelligent, poor, uneducated, masculine men participate in boxing. Inherent within this concept of 'the boxer' is also the ideal of compulsory heterosexuality, although this is implicit so as to be made invisible. The production of 'the boxer', as a totalizing identity, results in a discourse that unproblematically implicates all participants in the sport; 'the boxer' has a required normativity that must be written into the silence of individual boxers. The subject position, 'the boxer', is produced in discourse about boxing and not necessarily by virtue of punching another within a boxing ring. In order to be understood as legitimately taking up the subject position, 'the boxer', a person must conform to the rules of boxing discourse.

The production of this apparently coherent identity 'the boxer' prevents anyone outside of that identity from being an intelligible subject within the discourse about boxing (Butler, 1990). Yet, the shifting of the intersections of different aspects of identity allows otherwise incomprehensible participants to be seemingly and unproblematically encapsulated within the discourse. This foregrounding of a particular characteristic of an

individual allows for the silencing of other aspects, in much the same way as a chocolate sauce may include other flavours that are not immediately discernable, yet they are a part of the overall flavour of the sauce. A more delicate flavour, for example nutmeg, may be silenced by the overpowering taste of another, like coffee, but the nutmeg will still change the overall flavour of the sauce. If the nutmeg were to be left out, then the sauce would be different. In situations where encapsulation is not possible, the participant is so strongly marginalized as to render him[1] unintelligible as 'the boxer'; he becomes a parody or cartoon. For example, Oscar de la Hoya was defeated in a controversial 1999 decision because his performance was thought to be unmanly, thus producing him as a failed subject within the discourse of boxing. The decision against de la Hoya was seen as a punitive reaction to his moving away from his opponent in the later rounds of the fight (Miller, 2001).

In this paper, I use queer theory to argue that the disruption of the dominant discourse about what it is to be a boxer requires more than a separate interrogation of race, gender, class, and sexuality. The creation of a totalizing subject position through the discourse of boxing, in its entirety, is oppressive to boxers. While this becomes difficult due to the constraints of language, I use the notion of queering to make this point. The queer theory that interests me is that which is inclusive of aspects of identity besides sexuality. I consider some of the debates around what queer theory[2] is (or is not), the

---

[1] I use the pronoun 'him' because 'the boxer' must be understood as male to fit within the discourse about boxing, even if 'he' is actually female, as in the case of Laila Ali. I argue this later in this paper. This point is also argued extensively in Chapter 2: She Sure Can Hit: Boxing With Gender.

[2] It is not my intention to put forward an exhaustive review of all the debates around queer theory and the usage of the word queer. My intention is to discuss some of the concerns and inconsistencies that have been shown to exist within queer theory, and to address those as they pertain to my particular usage of queer as a theory.

kinds of analyses queer theory can accommodate, and thus, how queer theory is, can, or should be deployed.

The queer theory that I am proposing is inclusive of sexuality, but also of other components of identity, such as (but not limited to) race, class, age, education, intelligence, gender, and sex. It is my contention that sexuality is implicated in the understanding of all people, whether explicitly discussed or not, but that sexuality alone is not a sufficient condition on which to generate understanding. I wish to call this queer theory, because I believe that to understand sexuality, or indeed any other aspect of identity, you must look at how they are co-constitutive of one another. That is, sexuality is never absent of, for example, racialization and class is never ungendered. The kind of queer theory that I wish to do cannot privilege sexuality because to understand sexuality requires the consideration of the intersections of these components in as much complexity as a language of separability allows. I do not wish to call this Post-Colonial-Marxist-Post-Modern-Feminist-Pedagogical-Cultural-Queer Theory, because, as I have previously argued, I do not believe that each part of an identity can stand on its own. As Gloria Anzaldúa (1991) writes, "Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person" (pp. 252-253). A complex intersecting of aspects, such as race, class, gender, age, and sexuality, constitutes those who box. 'The boxer', as an identity (and individual boxers), is not made up of each particular characteristic, but is a discursive identity that is created by the flowing together of these characteristics, like the sauces flow together in the opening analogy.

While each of the previously mentioned theories has something to offer in a critique of boxing and the construction of the coherent entity 'the boxer', none of them is inclusive enough to sufficiently complicate the discourse on its own. Given that each component of identity does not work in isolation, but in a complex relationship with all of the other components, to deny this would be an oversimplification. To then try to disrupt the ways that one can be a boxer by only looking at one particular aspect of that identity is to misunderstand that aspect and to allow the erasure or silencing of other aspects.

To focus only on sexuality, or to privilege it as having more of an impact, is to suggest that sexuality does not interact with gender or race or age; that each aspect can act in isolation. A normative/ anti-normative queer theory allows each component of identity to be read in relation to the others and its normative status. This unfortunately seems to posit a binary with normative on one side and anti-normative on the other. This is not my intention. It is my intention to argue that normativity, the standard to which people are commonly judged, is a myth that allows the production of discourses that oppress those who are judged wanting. The implication of this is that normativity can never actually be achieved and held, as it is not a static monolith, but a changing discursive ideal. This ideal, then, changes not only as all discursive productions fluidly change, but it also changes in relation to the discourse in which the judging occurs (Flax, 1992). Normativity, then in the case of 'the boxer', can be read in relation to a Western, white, middle-class, masculine norm (the social standard or norm in North America) or to the norm created in the dominant discourse on boxing. I am interested both in how the dominant discourse of boxing queers the social standard and how individual boxers queer the dominant discourse of boxing.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is a contested term that is sometimes used as a catchall for marginalized sexual groups, or as a radical new theory that has emerged out of lesbian and gay studies (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory has been critiqued by some as not being inclusive of other forms of difference, for example race or gender (Anzaldúa, 1991; Martin, 1996; Walters, 1996). Queer theory has also been critiqued for being so inclusive as to erase difference (Butler, 1997; Goldman, 1996; Walters, 1996). The common ground in the debate is identity. Queer theory questions identity, but what kind of identity and how? Gamson (2000) argues that "queer studies is largely a deconstructive enterprise, taking apart the view of a self defined by something at its core, be it sexual desire, race, gender, nation, or class" (p. 348). He goes on to say, "*Queer* marks an identity that, defined as it is by a deviation from sex and gender norms either by the self inside or by specific behaviours, is always in flux" (Gamson, 2000, p. 349 emphasis in original). I read Gamson's initial argument to mean that queer theory need not necessarily privilege sexuality; however his definition of queer seems to foreclose on this possibility by limiting queer identity to a queer sexuality. If a queer identity is required in order to queer, then who may be discussed in queer theory is also limited.

The distinction between queer identity and queer theory is important. While questions regarding how queer theory may be used must also include questions of what it means to *be* queer, I believe that it must not be limited by those questions. In agreement with some other queer theorists I eschew the use of labels as they become static, limiting categories that are used to oppress. I understand queer as a way of reading an action,

behaviour, or characteristic, so that queer can remain a fluid, dynamic term. This way of reading requires the presence of participants who show the failure of the totalizing claims of the discourse by virtue of their presence. Their presence calls into question the totalizing claims of the discourse, which in turn calls into question all of the claims of the discourse. Their ability to disrupt the discourse is not based on 'who they are' or 'what they are', but merely on their presence. The distinction between queer as a noun and queer as a verb remains important even if the noun is understood as dynamic. If queer theory (queering) can only be used on queer subjects (those who *are* queer), then the theory becomes limited by identity politics. Who may or may not use the *label* queer is not what I am arguing; I am interested in what may be *queered*. What I am proposing then, is that queering (using queer theory to disrupt discourses) need not be limited by who *is* queer, but may also include all who help queer the discourse.

Beemyn and Eliason (1996) write that queer theory must "be flexible enough to accommodate all people who identify as queer" (p. 3). They chose to use "queer" in their book title because "it potentially leaves room for all people who are attracted to others of the same sex or whose bodies or sexual desires do not fit dominant standards of gender and/or sexuality" (Beemyn & Eliason, 1996, p. 5).

Beemyn and Eliason (1996) go on to argue, "queer theory has the *potential* to be inclusive of race, gender, sexuality, and other areas of identity by calling attention to the distinctions between identities, communities, and cultures, rather than ignoring these differences or pretending that they don't exist" (p. 165 emphasis in original). In being inclusive of these other areas of identity, should queer theory privilege sexuality over them? Is this not the original critique of lesbian and gay studies, that "asserting the

primacy of sexuality forced false choices (between an identity as a lesbian and as a black, for instance) and obscured the important connections among race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, physical ability, and class" (Gamson, 2000, p. 353)? I read Krane (2001) as arguing that queer theory has moved beyond lesbian and gay studies because, "queer theory seeks to avoid privileging one component of identity over another" (p. 404). This may also be the opinion of Tierney (1997) who sees queer theory as seeking "to interrogate terms such as gender and race so that the norms of our lives are reconfigured" (p. 37).

While some writers argue that queer theory is actually too inclusive because it renders difference invisible, others argue that it is not inclusive enough. Walters (1996) critiques "queer" because she feels that it "erases lesbian specificity and the enormous difference that gender makes, evacuates the importance of feminism, and rewrites the history of lesbian feminism and feminism generally" (Walters, 1996, p. 843). Goldman (1996) argues, "existing queer theory, despite attempts to avoid normativity, harbors a normative discourse around race, sexuality, and class" (p. 179). These critiques suggest that queer theory in practice has not lived up to the potential mentioned by Beemyn and Eliason (1996). Goldman (1996) proposes an alternate direction for queer theory saying, "if queer theory is to truly challenge the "normal," it must provide a framework in which to challenge racist, misogynist, and other oppressive discourse/norms, as well as those that are heterosexist and homophobic" (p. 174).

Butler (1990; 1997), Sedgwick (1990; 1995), Rubin (1993), and Jagose (1996) all seem to agree that queer theory is about sex, gender and sexuality, but they also open up the possibility of other components, such as race being included in the analysis. This is

arguably in agreement with Gamson (2000), Goldman (1996), and Tierney (1997) who all have argued that other oppressions must also be addressed. Warner (1993) also affirms this need to broaden beyond sexuality, sex and gender when he discusses how sexuality is connected with so many seemingly different aspects of life:

> Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatisation is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. (p. xiii)

While some queer theory is about decentred norms, and challenging the normal in relation to the components of identity, there also seems to be some argument against this kind of open-ended queery. According to Martin (1996), Sedgwick is adamant that queerness remain associated with homosexuality, warning, "for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term's definitional center, would be to dematerialise any possibility of queerness itself" (Sedgwick, 1993, cited in Martin, 1996, p. 75). If queer must always mean homosexual, what happens to others who do not fit the sexual social standard, such as bisexuals, sado-masochists, or transgendered persons? Should there be a Homosexual Queer Theory, and an Other Queer Theory? Is this not creating a normative position in queer theory? Arguably it is this kind of exclusionary theorizing that causes some, like Goldman (1996), to write about "*queer* queers", and to

suggest that, "those of us who fall outside of this normativity are thus rendered *queer* queers and must position ourselves and our work in opposition to [existing queer theory]" (p. 179 emphasis in original). By negating other aspects of identity, and defining queer as homosexual, Sedgwick has rendered many people unintelligible within queer discourse. Given this limitation, I am more convinced by Warner's (1993) approach to queer theory: "For both academics and activists, "queer" gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (p. xxvi). It is with this kind of queer theory in mind, that I turn my gaze towards boxing, and what specific lens allows for a different view of this sport's participants.

It is my intention to use queer theory to disrupt the way the concept 'the boxer' affects all participants in the sport, not only those who self-identify as queer. I understand 'the boxer' to queer the social norm regardless of individual behaviour or self-identification. A boxer who does not fit within the discourse on boxing (for example, a white, feminine, middle-aged, homosexual woman) can also queer both the boxing discourse and the social norm. In both of these cases, the oppression is based on the anti-normativity of the participant. In the first case, 'the boxer' is seen as anti-normative in relation to many social values; in the latter, the participant is seen as anti-normative in relation to the dominant discourse on boxing. For example, Willie de Wit and Henry Tillman met in the gold-medal match of the 1984 Olympics. Tillman was an African-American boxer from the inner city of Los Angeles; de Wit was a white, middle-class Canadian from a northern Alberta town. The match ended the way that most expected it would, with Tillman, 'the boxer', stealing the gold medal dreams of de Wit, the nice Canadian kid, who was 'the not boxer'. The stereotypical understanding of the two men

was further exploited 16 years later when the two were said to do battle again, only this time in the courtroom (May, 2000). 'The boxer' from the first match, Tillman, moved from being the thief of the gold medal to "being on the ropes" as he was on trial for murder (May, 2000). 'The not boxer', de Wit, who had the gold medal dream "stolen" from him in the first match, was now the triumphant lawyer, although he was not actually a part of Tillman's trial (May, 2000). Tillman's boxing career was conflated with his criminal behaviour, thereby naturalizing his guilt. The article uses 'experts' in psychology to argue that former professional athletes who come from poor upbringings are predisposed to addictions and criminal behaviour, with boxers being even more at risk of violent behaviour (May, 2000). The portrayal of this as his inability to behave appropriately outside of the ring, 4 years after his retirement, shows how 'the boxer' is marginalized within the cultural norm[3]. The success of de Wit is presented as an indication that the better *boxer* may have won in Los Angeles but the better *man* won in the long run, as de Wit "won the real prize" (May, 2000). The article goes on to suggest that if de Wit had won the gold medal, making him 'the boxer', that he "probably would have [led] a whole different life" (de Wit quoted in May, 2000). The easy inference being that had de Wit won, he might be the one on trial for murder. In both cases the reaction to the anti-normativity is to marginalize the participant; in de Wit's case, he is marginalized within boxing discourse; Tillman is marginalized within the social standard.

The presence of a marginalized individual exposes the failure of the totalizing claims of the discourse. While I believe that the more traditionally queer individual (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender) has an important impact on the coherent identity

[3] Tillman's trial occurred in 2000, however the crime occurred in 1996, 4 years after his retirement from boxing in 1992.

'the boxer' that is worthy of study, I do not wish to focus on that particular athlete to the exclusion of others. To borrow Warner's (1993) words, I wish "to make theory queer, not just to have a theory about queers" (p. xxvi).

The Dominant Discourse On Boxing

> Coherent theories in an obviously incoherent world are either silly and uninteresting or oppressive and problematic, depending upon the degree of hegemony they manage to achieve. Coherent theories in an *apparently* coherent world are even more dangerous, for the world is always more complex than such unfortunately hegemonious theories can grasp. (Harding, 1986, p.164 emphasis in original)

'The boxer' is understood in just such a coherent fashion. The boxing world is created in such a way as to appear coherent, making the understanding of 'the boxer' "even more dangerous" (Harding, 1986, p. 164)[4]. The meaning of 'the boxer' has been solidified in popular culture, such as films, and novels, as well as in some academic writing. Movies like *When We Were Kings* (Sonenberg, Gast, & Hackford, 1996), *Girlfight* (Green, Griffin, & Renzi, 2000), *The Human Stain* (Rosenberg, Lucchesi, & Steindorff, 2002), and *Million Dollar Baby* (Eastwood, 2004) strengthen the stereotype of 'the boxer' by superficially showing a character that does not seem to fit within the discourse, while subversively showing how the intersections can be manipulated to

[4] For a more thorough discussion of the boxing world see Sammons (1988).

encapsulate the character within the discourse. The same picture of stupid, uneducated, poor, young, heterosexual, black men prostituting themselves through boxing to overcome financial obstacles is also offered up in works such as *On Boxing* (Oates, 1987) and *Ghosts of Manila* (Kram, 2001), as well as in some ethnographies in academic work (Mennesson, 2000; Sugden, 1998; Wacquant, 1995).

When a boxer endangers the boxing discourse by showing the stereotype to be problematic, the intersections of the characteristics that make up the coherent entity of 'the boxer' are shifted to encapsulate the athlete. This shifting of intersections works to silence particular aspects of a person in order to allow the person to remain a subject of the particular discourse. As Foucault (1976/1990) noted, "there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (p. 27). These silences function as "a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide relatively obscure areas of tolerance" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 101). The silencing of particular characteristics allows a person to assume the subject position of the discourse, who may otherwise be unintelligible within the discourse.

Laila Ali, daughter of world famous boxer Muhammad Ali, is an example of how silence, due to the shifting of intersections, accommodates, while erasing subjectivity. She can be encapsulated within the discourse on boxing by shifting the intersection of race and gender. As Martin (1996) writes, "blackness or color in women is associated with phallic traces and femininity with whiteness" (p. 87). Her blackness can, therefore, be read as masculinizing. The intersection (in this case) of race and gender allows her encapsulation within the coherent identity of 'the boxer' because of the shift toward

masculinity enabled by her race. This functions to render her gender silent, producing her, as a subject within boxing discourse, as 'the boxer'[5].

The sportswriters' portrayal of Muhammad Ali is an example of another kind of encapsulation of the individual into the discourse on boxing. While some academics speak of Ali as a political force who helped create social change (Abdel-Shehid, 2003; Saeed, 2002; Sammons, 1988), sportswriters speak of him as an unintelligent puppet (Kram, 2001; Mailer and Plimpton in Sonenberg, Gast, & Hackford, 1996). The sportswriter requires the discourse to be maintained. The discourse gives the sportswriter words to use unproblematically, as well as allowing the apparent interpretive authority of the writer over the boxer to be reified. If the coherence of the discourse is shown to be suspect, then the failure of language is made explicit, and the hierarchy can no longer be maintained. Ali as an intelligent figure disrupts the dominant discourse of boxing. By portraying Ali as a simple-minded dupe the sportswriters are able to subsume him into the discourse, thus reifying it.

The common understanding of 'the boxer' is: "The rags to riches narrative, in which the deprived, marginalized figure traverses the barriers of class and race through physical prowess to assume hero status and vast wealth" (Chandler, 1996, p. 17), where 'the boxer' must also be "a gendered being embodying and exemplifying a definite form of masculinity: plebeian, heterosexual, and heroic" (Wacquant, 1995, p. 90). The marginalization of this figure is not within the dominant boxing discourse. This figure is of "a special underclass" (Chandler, 1996, p. 17) that is marginalized by normative social values.

---

[5] For a larger discussion of other ways Laila Ali is encapsulated into boxing discourse, see Chapter 2: She Sure Can Hit: Boxing With Gender.

The discourse about boxing requires 'the boxer' to be heterosexual in part because of the homosocial environment of boxing. The homoerotic atmosphere in the ring requires a paradoxical compulsory heterosexuality to allow boxing to be seen as a sport and not a potentially sexual encounter[6]. Oates (1987) describes the homoeroticism of boxing explicitly:

> No sport is more physical, more direct, than boxing. No sport appears more powerfully homoerotic: the confrontation in the ring – the disrobing – the sweaty heated combat that is part dance, courtship, coupling – the frequent urgent pursuit by one boxer of the other in the fight's natural and violent movement toward the "knockout". (p. 30)

The homosexual boxer disrupts this paradox, forcing the heterosexual boxer to "elicit suspicions of homosexual desire in oneself and others across the range of daily same-sex interactions, friendships, dreams, fantasies, and public images" (Seidman, 1997, p. 149). Thus, a boxer who does not meet the standard of sexuality set out in the discourse creates unease in those boxers who do meet the standard.

While 'the boxer' must be heterosexual in boxing discourse, he is also understood to have a sexuality that is consistent with his race, gender, class, age, and so on. Because 'the boxer' is read as black, masculine, and ghettoised, 'the boxer's' sexuality, while heteronormative, is deviant in relation to the social standard. The stereotype of black male sexuality fully developed in the late nineteenth century, when the black male was seen as a threat to white womanhood (Moorti, 2002). According to Moorti, the ideological construction of the black male as a lascivious monster that preyed on white

[6] For a more general discussion of homoeroticism in men's sport see Pronger (1992; 1999).

women continues to resonate today. The invisible referent of the bestial black male requires 'the boxer' to be hyper-sexed. The aggressiveness and violence that is required in the ring is also expected to be played out in an excessive aggressive sexual appetite. Arguably then, 'the boxer', although compulsorily heterosexual, can queer, that is expose and disrupt, the social standard.

Individual boxers can, therefore, sometimes queer the dominant boxing discourse, and can always be seen to queer the social standard. Queer theory, then, will allow me to call into question discourses and social norms "so that differences of ethnicity, race, class, nation, and a multitude of other possible formations, come into question, analysis and consideration" (Tierney, 1997, p. 44).

Queer Theory and Boxing

The idea that 'the boxer' queers the social standard, when the normative notion of 'the boxer' is compared with the cultural norm of the social standard, suggests that the discourse that creates the identity 'the boxer' is problematic in a similar way to the discourse that creates the identity 'homosexual'. What queers the discourse is not necessarily any particular behaviour that an individual athlete might engage in, but that 'the boxer' is an anti-normative identity in relation to normative social values. This is the same kind of anti-normative identity as 'the homosexual'. The identity of 'the homosexual' emerged through medical and legal discourses in the 1870s (Foucault, 1976/1990). Previously, individuals performed behaviours that could be characterised as homosexual, but those individuals were not labelled as 'homosexual'. The discursive

production of the identity 'homosexual', allows any person who appears to fit into the identity to be subsumed within it, regardless of any actual behaviours performed by that person[7]. The individual is then thought to have certain other characteristics by virtue of belonging to the identity 'homosexual' (for example, effeminacy in men, or butchness in women). This also occurs to 'the boxer'. With the totalizing identity 'the boxer' the person is understood to exhibit certain static personality traits, characteristics and behaviours.

The act of participating in the sport of boxing allows a person to be understood as 'the boxer'. The person need not self-identify as 'the boxer', because in the same fashion as Foucault's (1976/1990) 'homosexual', the subjectivity of the person within the discourse is a function of the knowledge produced by the expert within the discourse. For 'the homosexual', the experts were medical doctors and researchers, as well as judges and lawmakers; for 'the boxer', the experts are sportswriters, boxing governing bodies (and in some cases legal governing bodies such as lawmakers), boxing managers, promoters, and coaches, as well as fans and critics of the sport. The experts lay down the rules of the discourse, allowing the production of the subject. While the discursively produced subject is fluid and changeable, the common understanding of the subject position may be seen as totalizing and fixed. Moreover, the subject is then seen to always be a subject within that discourse, regardless of his/her performance. In the case of 'the boxer', this person is thought to embody the other characteristics of 'the boxer', for example, a lack of intelligence and education, poverty, aggression, masculinity, and so forth. The person need not actually embody these characteristics to be understood as

[7] For example, an effeminate man may be presumed homosexual even though he may not have, or desire to have, sex with men.

having them constitute aspects of their identity. "It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 43). The person is 'the boxer', and therefore he is stupid; the person is 'the homosexual', and therefore he is effeminate (or she is manly). By understanding the discourse about boxing to have this effect, I wish to "queer" boxing in the way that Seidman (1997) writes of queering, "as a discursive strategy involving the displacement or the placing into doubt of foundational assumptions [...] for the purpose of opening up new possibilities for critical social analysis and political practice" (pp. x-xi).

While 'the boxer' can queer the social standard, the implications of this queering of 'the boxer' cannot be said to be as troubling as a boxer who is seen to queer the dominant boxing discourse. A boxer who is anti-normative within the discourse of boxing, for example a lesbian boxer, queers the concept of 'the boxer', but also the social standard. This boxer, the queer boxer, is more problematic because she shows the coherence of the boxing discourse to be suspect, as well as showing the standards by which all boxers are judged to be normative in an oppressive manner. The queer boxer is also more likely to be stigmatized, as she or he is anti-normative in both the normative social world and the boxing world[8].

The interrogation of the concept 'the boxer', and its relationship to social standards, as well as how the individual participant is forced to be encapsulated within the discourse, will best be disrupted by an anti-normative queer theory. This theory will

[8] By "queer boxer" I am referring to the previous argument of a boxer who does not appropriately embody the subject position of 'the boxer', not necessarily a homosexual boxer.

allow the disruption of the discourse that forces 'the boxer' to be a marginalized figure in a social standardized world, by denaturalizing the normative assumptions that constitute the discursive construction 'the boxer'. By understanding discursive aspects of identity to intersect with each other in a complex manner that actually constitute each other, the identity 'the boxer' can be disrupted and destabilized.

Final Thoughts

By way of a conclusion, I outline two kinds of analyses that this kind of queer theory can enhance in boxing. These analyses serve as concrete examples of how the theory I have explained can be used in practice. In the first instance I show how Vitali Klitschko can queer the social standard as well as the boxing discourse. The second example is a discussion of a young professional fighter who does not embody the characteristics of 'the boxer' as maintained within the discourse on boxing, thus queering the boxing discourse and the social standard.

Vitali Klitschko is a former Olympic gold-medallist. His current assent through the rankings of professional boxing has placed him as a contender for the Undisputed Heavy Weight Champion of the World, and he currently holds the World Boxing Council (WBC) heavyweight title. He is a white Ukrainian with a PhD in sport science and he speaks four languages. While he initially seems to be unable to fit within boxing discourse because of his whiteness, his Eastern European background along with his heavily accented English allow his encapsulation. Or as Michael Corleone in *The Godfather Part III* put it "just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!" (Coppola,

1990)[9]. This is a similar situation to 'the boxer' who appears to be free of the stereotype, but is then pulled back into the discourse by a shifting of the intersections of identity aspects to allow him to be encapsulated within the discourse.

Klitschko's obvious intelligence and education are ignored and erased by references to his "broken English" (Rafael, 2003). His foreignness is naturalized into a racial difference that is similar to the racialization of black athletes; he is seen as more physical, less intelligent, and more 'savage' than the hegemonically white masculine man. This racialization has its roots in the othering propaganda of the cold war that naturalized the Russians as vicious irrational dupes of a dangerous political system. The way in which sportswriters talk about Klitschko as "coldly destructive", and likening him to "the Terminator" show this racialization in practice (Hayward, 2003; see also Hannan, 2003; Hoffer, 2004; Lotierzo, 2003). The references to his being detached, cold and mechanical are used to separate him from the social standard.

The need to understand Klitschko as an irrational, unintelligent dupe exposes the limitation of the boxing discourse, but it also exposes the limitation of the social standard. The requirement of rationality and the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity that are a part of the social standard do not allow for Klitschko to be seen as both normative and 'the boxer'. This deviation from the standard of masculinity and rationality also call into question his whiteness. Rather than being a white boxer from a now Westernised part of Europe, which he could legitimately be described as, he is racialized in a way that can be seen to queer the social standard.

---

[9] This occurs when Michael realizes that his attempts to leave the mafia, and no longer be 'Godfather', are not acceptable to his former business associates, forcing him to continue to act in a criminal manner.

Jelena Mrdjenovich is white, Canadian, middle-class, university educated, and heterosexual. She has long hair and is soft-spoken and typically feminine. She is also ranked eleventh on the world junior lightweight female boxing ladder (Gallant, 2003)[10]. How then, can she be made sense of within the discourse on boxing? She defies the identity of 'the boxer' in so many ways that she cannot be 'pulled back in' by the discourse. Her unintelligibility as a boxing subject queers this discourse. Her presence in boxing reveals the normative assumptions that constitute the identity 'the boxer' as not truths that merely describe those who participate in this athletic subculture, but as discursive productions. Her ability in the boxing ring is obviously not based on blackness, poverty, or maleness. The assumption that 'the boxer' must be these things is, therefore, exposed as flawed.

Because Mrdjenovich cannot be 'pulled back in' to boxing discourse, sportswriters refer to her in ways that show she is not a 'real' boxer. She is always a "female boxer", whose success in the ring is often less important to the article than her femininity[11]. The constant use of "female boxer" is a collocation; a repeated co-occurrence between particular words that implicitly acknowledge an alternative (Fairclough, 2001). The implicitly acknowledged alternative is the more appropriate "male boxer", a collocation that is unnecessary as the male is the default position. Mrdjenovich's fear of being 'pulled in' by the discourse is obvious as she becomes complicit in the marginalization of herself as a boxer. In a newspaper article Mrdjenovich was quoted as saying "I don't want to be one of the guys, [...] I am a female outside boxing. I definitely want to be looked at as feminine, not masculine, not butchy"

---

[10] As of 24 May 2005 Mrdjenovich has moved to 6th in the world in the female lightweight category (wban, 2005).

[11] For examples of this behaviour by sportswriters see Gallant (2004) or Spencer (2003).

(Spencer, 2003, p. C14). She is distancing herself from the understanding of the totalized identity 'the boxer', and calling into question both her place in the boxing discourse, and the 'naturalness' of the social standard.

The queer theory I have put forward allows the acknowledgement of the oppressiveness of a naturalized totalizing identity such as 'the boxer'. The queering of these two particular professional boxers, show the subject position 'the boxer' as it is currently understood to be problematic, thus queering the boxing discourse and the social standard. In the case of Mrdjenovich, 'the boxer' is shown to be too limiting, and requiring of disruption, so that her skill in the sport need not be overshadowed by her gender. With Klitschko, the 'pulling back in' is unnecessary and, arguably, limiting to him. His prowess in the boxing ring should not negate his other achievements and abilities. These examples show the necessity of queering boxing for all boxers, not only those who may more traditionally be thought of as queer.

The use of this kind of analysis in boxing also shows the limitations of certain kinds of queer theory. Using queer as a theory instead of an identity enhances the possibility for disruption. The disruption of discourses that are naturalized and totalizing is politically important for all people who are currently disadvantaged or oppressed. To limit the use of a theory that allows this disruption to only particular kinds of groups is an unnecessary limitation of queer theory's potential. It is my intention to allow queer theory to become a vehicle for this kind of political action, as theory is not merely theoretical but has practical, material implications for those people who live within the confines of oppressive discourses. While I agree with the concerns of theorists who wish to make queer a safe haven that cannot be appropriated by straight white middle-class men, I also

feel that queer theory (as opposed to identity) needs the freedom to queer wherever disruption is necessary.

References

Abdel-Shehid, G. (2003). Muhammad Ali: America's B-side. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 26*(3), 319-327.

Anzaldúa, G. (1991). To(o) queer the writer: Loca, escrita y chicana. In B. Warland (Ed.), *InVersions: Writing by Dykes, Queers and Lesbians* (pp. 249 - 263). Vancouver: Press Gang.

Beemyn, B. & Eliason, M. (1996). *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*. New York: New York University Press.

Butler, J. (1997). Against proper objects. In E. Weed, & N. Schor (Eds.), *Feminism meets queer theory* (pp. 1 - 30). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Chandler, D. (1996). Introduction: The pictures of boxing. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 13 - 25). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Coppola, F. F. (Producer & Director). (1990). *The Godfather Part III* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Paramount Pictures

Eastwood, C. (Producer & Director). (2004). *Million Dollar Baby* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Warner Brothers Pictures

Fairclough, N. (2001). The discourse of New Labour: Critical discourse analysis. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis* (pp. 229 - 266). London, UK: Sage and the Open University.

Flax, J. (1992). The end of innocence. In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (pp. 445 - 463). New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976)

Gallant, C. (2004, May 13). Two major fight cards within six weeks. *The Edmonton Journal*. D4.

Gallant, C. (2003, December 6). Showing the boys how it's done. *The Edmonton Journal*. C1, C4.

Gamson, J. (2000). Sexualities, queer theory, and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2nd Edition (pp. 347 - 365). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Green, S., Griffin, M., & Renzi, M. (Producers), & Kusama, K. (Director). (2000). *Girlfight* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Sony Pictures

Goldman, R. (1996). Who is that *queer* queer? Exploring norms around sexuality, race, and class in queer theory. In Beemyn, B., & Eliason, M. (Eds.), *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology* (pp. 169 - 182). New York: New York University Press.

Hannan, M. (2003). Lennox's Vitali spark. *Scotsman.com*. retrieved January 3, 2004 from http://www.sport.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=1372212003

Harding, S. (1986). *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Hayward, P. (2003). Champion warned that time emasculates even the mightiest of men. *Sport.telegraph*. retrieved January 3, 2004 from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/main.jhtml?xml=/sport/2003/12/10/sohayw10.xml&sSheet=/portal/2003/12/10/ixportal.html

Hoffer, R. (2004, May 3). Special K. *Sports Illustrated, 100*(18), 79.

Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Kram, M. (2001). *Ghosts of Manila: The Fateful Blood Feud Between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Krane, V. (2001). One lesbian epistemology: Integrating feminist standpoint, queer theory, and feminist cultural studies. *The Sport Psychologist, 15*, 401-411.

Lotierzo, F. (2003). The Klitschko bros: Definite lightning rods. *East Side Boxing*. Retrieved January 3, 2004 from http://www.eastsideboxing.com/news.php?p=363&more=1

Martin, B. (1996). *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian*. New York: Routledge.

May, H. (2000, February 13). DeWit vs. Tillman – again: One won gold, the other won the real prize. *Calgary Herald*. A12.

McDonald, M. G., & Birrell, S. (1999). Reading sport critically: A methodology for interrogating power. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 16*(4), 283-301.

Mennesson, C. (2000). Hard women and soft women: The social construction of identities among female boxers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 35*(1), 21-33.

Miller, T. (2001). *Sport Sex*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Moorti, S. (2002). *Color of Rape*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Oates, J. C. (1987). *On Boxing*. New York: Zebra Books.

Pronger, B. (1999). Fear and trembling: Homophobia in men's sport. In P. White & K. Young (Eds.), *Sport and Gender in Canada*. Toronto, Canada: Oxford Press.

Pronger, B. (1992). *The Arena of Masculinity*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Rafael, D. (2003, June 6). Lewis keeps belt, but Klitschko proves mettle. *USA Today*, 12c.

Rosenberg, .T, Lucchesi, G., & Steindorff, S. (Producers), & Benton, R. (Director). (2002). *The Human Stain* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Miramax Film Corp

Rubin, G. (1993). Thinking Sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In Abelove, H., Barale, M., & Halperin, D. (Eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. (pp. 3 - 44) New York: Routledge.

Saeed, A. (2002). What's in a name? Muhammad Ali and the politics of cultural identity. *Culture, Sport, Society, 5*(3), 51-72.

Sammons, J. (1988). *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Sedgwick, E. (1995). "Gosh, Boy George, you must be awfully secure in your masculinity!". In Berger, M., Wallis, B., & Watson, S. (Eds.) *Constructing Masculinity*. (pp. 11 - 20) New York: Routledge.

Sedgwick, E. (1993). *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Sedgwick, E. (1990). *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Seidman, S. (1997). *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sonenberg, D., Gast, L., & Hackford, T. (Producers), & Gast, L. (Director). (1996). *When We Were Kings* [motion picture]. U.S.A.: Gramercy Pictures

Spencer, C. (2003, December 26). Beware when beauty becomes the beast. *The Ottawa Citizen*, C14.

Sugden, D. (1998). *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Tierney, W. (1997). *Academic Outlaws: Queer Theory and Cultural Studies in the Academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wacquant, L. (1995). Pugs at work: Bodily capital and bodily labour among professional boxers. *Body and Society, 1*(1), 65-94.

Walters, S. (1996). From here to queer: Radical feminism, postmodernism, and the lesbian menace (or, why can't a woman be more like a fag?). *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 21*(4), 830-869.

Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In Warner, M. (Ed.) *Fear of A Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (pp. vii – xxxi). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Wban. (2005). Lightweight rankings. Retrieved May 24, 2005 from: http://www.wban.org/rankings/rankli.htm

Chapter 5

Concluding Thoughts

Thoughts

There are many roads I did not take in writing this thesis. Down each avenue another road appeared, and following all of them was never a possible, or desirable, task. The choices I made to follow one path or take another were political choices. The politics behind each choice may not be evident, but they were not made lightly. Some of the choices were made in order to attack the less obvious aspects of boxing; many were made to destroy the obvious, implicit assumptions produced in popular culture.

A common thread throughout the chapters of this thesis is the discussion of what is possible and what is impossible within the normative assumptions of dominant discourses. This was a deliberate political decision intended to show the violence inherent in this kind of practice. As Butler (2004) writes about gender transgression:

> To find that one is fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find one to be an impossibility) is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human. It is to find oneself speaking only and always as if one were human, but with the sense that one is not. (p. 218)

In accepting Butler's contention that the impossible is the other against which the human is know, I must believe that possibility has an important place in political discussions. Borrowing Butler's (2004) words again, I would argue that "The thought of a possible

life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible" (p. 219).

The politics of foregrounding the obvious, yet implicit and therefore silenced, aspects of a normative understanding require that the obvious and explicit be discussed also. For example, with the terms 'lesbian' and 'dyke', what is obvious and explicit is sex and sexuality. Yet, implicit in these terms are also class, race, education, gender, and age. While many may think it obvious that a 'dyke' is working class, this is not often explicitly mentioned. The importance of discussing class in relationship with sex, gender and sexuality is that the material effects on the 'dyke' versus the working class heterosexual male are quite different. To suggest that class effects are the most important, or that class effects are the same in each class, is not only reductive, but politically, it erases the effects faced by many.

The same is true of any other single aspect, and arguably of many readings that take into account a single intersection. A 'lesbian' and a 'dyke' are often treated quite differently, and the other aspects of their identities are implicitly assumed to be distinctly unlike. With the intersections of class, sex, gender and sexuality implicit in the terms come the assumptions of education, intelligence, physical ability, and age, among others. The understanding of a dyke is then based on all of the intersections of these silent assumptions, and not merely on the intersection of femaleness and homosexuality. To assume that the intersection of sex and gender is able to speak of the material effects the individual lives is to problematically homogenise the lived effects, and therefore erase other distinctions.

As noted in chapter 4, the impossibility of speaking of all the intersections is compounded by the inability to articulate all of the connections. Some of the political choices I made, then, were an attempt to speak to many of these intersections. While this left out other connections, it was a political move done with thought, empathy, and consideration. It is also the beginning of a new road; a road which ought to have as many or more crossroads that will require further political decisions.

Future Directions

Boxing is a sport that evokes passionate responses from across a broad spectrum of people (Chandler, 1996). That people's reactions to boxing are visceral is reflective of the graphic physicality of the sport. As Sammons (1988) notes, boxing is both glorified and scorned "by a confused people who have prided themselves on civility and modernity but who cling to atavistic instincts" (p. 251). Discussions of boxing are never divorced from an underlying implied violence. This undercurrent is overtly addressed in ethical position papers about boxing, but is implied in gendered discussions that suggest boxing is an appropriate sport for men but not for women. While it is considered reasonable to state that women should not participate in boxing, and that arguably boxing by anyone should be banned, it is not considered reasonable to have this conversation about other sports. The controversial status of boxing makes it an interesting, yet difficult topic of study, which has the potential to provide a unique insight into the subjectification of people both inside and outside of sport.

Foucault (1969/2004) wrote that our task consists "of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or

representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). The formation of objects and subjects by the dominant discourse of boxing produces 'the Boxer', but also produces the person who is (re)presented as 'the Boxer'. While this production may appear to be related only to a person's relationship to the sport, I argue that the effects are far greater and more encompassing. Foucault's charge then, is to understand how the presentation of 'the Boxer' in popular culture is not a representation, but is instead a practice of producing and subjecting a subject.

This thesis has suggested many avenues of research for the future. My original question regarding the girls from the inner city boxing club has, however not been addressed, and it still holds my interest. Why do these girls go to the gym and train so hard? How can they make sense of themselves and their sport?

My future research will explore women's experience in, and the construction of their identities through sport. While much has been written about women and gender identities in other sports, boxing allows for an unusual perspective because the existing research on this sport has solidified its meaning in a very masculine way. Boxing is commonly thought of as masculine not only because it is considered aggressive and violent, but also because of commonsense beliefs concerning the relationship between masculinity, class, and race (Oates, 1987; Piper, 1996; Sammons, 1988; Sugden, 1996; Wacquant, 1995). My future research will discuss that which is excluded in the current literature, enabling me to open new avenues of discussion within the area of women and sport.

Due to the recent changes in the status of women's amateur boxing, more women and girls than ever before are now participating in this sport. My future research direction

seeks to understand how women make sense of and produce themselves as boxers, and how this complicates the way boxing, as a sport, might be understood. I foresee employing a feminist framework (Butler, 1990, 1993; Weedon, 1987) to elucidate how gender complicates the understanding(s) of boxing, and how identity(ies) is/are constructed within this sport. Specifically, I anticipate using ethnographic methods (Britzman, 2000; Geertz, 1988; Marcus & Fischer, 1986), which will entail interviewing and observing female boxers, their coaches, and other boxers in their boxing environments.

As there is currently very little written about women in boxing (Hargreaves, 1996; Mennesson, 2000; Sekules, 2000), it is impossible to adequately interrogate their involvement through a textual discourse analysis. Another limitation of a textual discourse analysis is that the effects of discourse can only be cursorily represented, whereas ethnography allows for an observation and interrogation of the daily-lived effects of discourse. My doctoral project, tentatively entitled: *The female boxer: A critical ethnographic inquiry*, aims to contribute to and expand this literature. Thus, the ethnographic aspects of my doctoral project will allow me to provide a more complex analysis of the participation of women in boxing, and of the sport itself.

References

Britzman, D. (2000). The question of belief: Writing poststructural ethnography. In E. St. Pierre, & W. Pillow (Eds.), *Working Through the Ruins: Feminist Poststructural Theory and Methods in Education* (pp. 27 - 40). New York and London, UK: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Chandler, D. (1996). Introduction: The pictures of boxing. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 13 - 25). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Foucault, M. (2004). *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.) London, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1969).

Geertz, C. (1988). *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hargreaves, J. (1996). Bruising Peg to boxerobics: Gendered boxing – Images and meanings. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 121 - 132). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Marcus, G. E. & Fischer, M. J. (1986). *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mennesson, C. (2000). Hard women and soft women: The social construction of identities among female boxers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(1), 21-33.

Oates, J. C. (1987). *On Boxing*. New York: Zebra Books.

Piper, K. (1996). Four corners, a contest of opposites. In D. Chandler, J. Gill, T. Guha, & G. Tawadros (Eds.), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (pp. 121 - 132). London, UK: First Mit Press.

Sammons, J. T. (1988). *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Sekules, K. (2000). *The Boxer's Heart: How I fell in Love with the Ring*. New York: Villard.

Sugden, J. (1996). *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Wacquant, L. (1995). Pugs at work: Bodily capital and bodily labour among professional boxers. *Body and Society, 1*(1), 65-94.

Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory*. New York: Basil Blackwell.